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Allegiances

Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN
Leader: Turtlestar- Grey tom with a black patch on his back and amber eyes
Deputy: Flamestripe- Sandy ginger tabby she-cat
Medicine cat: Mosssting- Grey tom with brown forepaws

Warriors:
Mistpetal- Grey and white she-cat
Whiteshade- White tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Hazelpaw
Cedarfoot- Red-brown tom with green eyes
Buzzardwish- White tom with brown forepaws and tail tip
Gingerclaw- Light ginger she-cat
Apprentice, Branchpaw
Flamelight- Fiery orange she-cat
Birchsong- Black and white tom
Apprentice, Berrypaw
Browntail- Dark grey tom with a mottled brown pelt and blue eyes
Doebrook- Pale brown she-cat
Sandwhisker- Sandy tom

Apprentices:
Berrypaw- Light cream she cat with orange, yellow, grey and black multicoloured pelt
Hazelpaw- Brown she-cat with darker brown underbelly
Branchpaw- Brown tom with dust brown paws and tail tip

Queens:
Stormfeather- Dark grey she-cat with brown eyes and unusually fluffy tail, mother of Whiteshade's kit (Kits: Stripekit- Dark grey-brown tom with light grey tabby stripes)
Moonpoppy- Light grey tabby she-cat with amber eyes, expecting Birchsong's kits

Elders:
Willownose- Light brown she-cat with green eyes

SHADOWCLAN
LEADER: Plumstar- Black and brown tom
DEPUTY: Badgerflame- Grey she-cat with black chest and underbelly
MEDICINE CAT: Leapwing- small, ginger she-cat with a mottled, dust brown pelt
Apprentice, Greypaw

WARRIORS
Grasspelt- greenish-grey tom
Thistleleap- cream-and-apricot tabby tom

RIVERCLAN
LEADER: Dapplestar- ginger and tortoiseshell she-cat with light blue eyes
DEPUTY: Blackface- Brown tom with black patch on face
MEDICINE CAT: Rainsplash- old, grey she-cat with lighter greying muzzle

WINDCLAN
LEADER: Ebonystar- jet black she-cat
DEPUTY: Stoneleg- grey tom with darker grey legs
MEDICINE CAT: Birchpoppy- golden tabby she-cat
Apprentice, Mousepaw

WARRIORS
Redheart- dark red she-cat with lighter red spots
Dotpelt- light brown tom with darker brown spots
Breezefaith- brown-and-grey tortoiseshell she-cat
Smoketail- orange and grey tabby tom
Mothstorm- brown tom

Prologue

The half-moon shone brightly in the sky, lighting up the ThunderClan camp. Shadows were cast over the dens and rain started to softly fall. A soft wind ruffled the fur of a dark grey she-cat as she sat outside the nursery.
"Whiteshade!" she called desperately. She could feel her kits inside her and knew it was their time to be born. She flexed her claws in and out as she waited for her mate to arrive. A heartbeat later, a snowy white tom with amber eyes raced over to her.
"Stormfeather!" he meowed. He gently licked her cheek.
"Get Mosssting!" Stormfeather gasped. Whiteshade shook his head in guilt.
"He's at the Moonpool, it's half-moon," he meowed. Stormfeather cried out in pain.
"Well someone do something!" she meowed impatiently.
Whiteshade quickly raced into the centre of the camp.
"Help! Stormfeather's kitting!" He looked desperately around the camp. His tail was quivering with desperation. He flicked his ear when he heard sounds emitting from the warriors' den. A moment later, Mistpetal emerged with Cedarfoot at her tail. They raced over to the white tom when they saw him stressing.
"What is it? What's wrong?" Mistpetal asked frantically.
"It's Stormfeather! Her kits are coming and Mosssting is at the Moonpool!"
"I'll go get him!" Cedarfoot meowed and raced out of the camp.
More warriors started to pad out of the warriors' den, all sheltering themselves from the rain. Buzzardpaw and Hazelpaw quickly padded out of their den and joined the crowd of cats around Whiteshade.
"Does anyone know anything about delivering kits?" He looked around, panic glittering in his eyes. Flamelight, Hazelpaw's mother, padded forward. "Well I've delivered my own so I know what happens, I can help," she mewed. Whiteshade nodded and raced back into the nursery with Flamelight following him closely; Stormfeather had gone back inside to shelter herself from the rain. Flamestripe was still sitting at the back of the nursery, her tail

wrapped around Berrykit and Branchkit. Stormfeather was lying in her nest, writhing in pain.
"Flamelight!" Her eyes lit up when she spotted the mother.
"Whiteshade, get a stick and some honey," she meowed sternly to Stormfeather's mate. He nodded and raced to the medicine den.
Stormfeather let out a low groan in pain.
"Stormfeather, I know it hurts but you'll be okay, just push when you fell a contraction," Flamelight instructed. Stormfeather nodded, and started panting harder, her flanks rising and falling rapidly.
Whiteshade entered the den and placed the stick and honey at his mate's head.
"Okay, eat the honey, it'll give you energy." Flamelight held the honey up to Stormfeather's mouth. She hungrily licked it up and sighed as the sweet liquid slid down her throat. She clenched her jaws and moaned as pain hit her again.
"Bite the stick and push!" Flamelight meowed. Stormfeather nodded and took the stick, biting down on it hard. A shrill mew filled the air. Stormfeather sighed with relief.
"It's a tom! That's the first one but I can feel more!" Flamelight told her, placing her paws gently on the queen's stomach. "Two more."
Stormfeather grunted and pushed again. Soon, a second was born.
"It's a she-kit!" Flamelight announced. Stormfeather looked at the tiny bundle of brown tabby fur. Flamelight's face fell. "She's not breathing," she mewed. "Her lips are blue..." She trailed off and handed to brown kit to Whiteshade. "Lick," she ordered. Whiteshade complied and started licking the kit rapidly to get it breathing.
"Oh no, is she okay?" Stormfeather asked, getting stressed.
"You just focus on getting that last kit out," Flamelight responded.
Stormfeather nodded and pushed again. The last kit came quickly and easily.
"It's another tom!" Flamelight meowed and gave the white tom to Stormfeather. He was tiny and scrappy, and he trembled uncontrollably. "He's very weak," Flamelight mewed.
Whiteshade suddenly let out a wail. "She's gone!" he cried. The brown tabby she-kit sat at his paws, completely still. Flamelight placed the white tom-kit beside the grey tabby tom at their mother's belly. "I'd like to name her Fernkit, in honour of my sister," Whiteshade mewed, silently grieving for his sister. Stormfeather nodded.
"Mousekit for the white tom, he's as tiny as a mouse," Stormfeather

mewed. "And Stripekit for the grey tabby."
Whiteshade smiled and nodded. He placed the deceased Fernkit at his mate's head.
"Goodbye, Fernkit. You're in a better place now," she meowed quietly. Flamelight padded out of the den. Whiteshade sat beside Stormfeather, admiring their beautiful kits.
Suddenly, a bulky grey figure appeared.
"Mosssting!" Stormfeather cried with relief. He bent down and inspected Fernkit.
"I'm so sorry," he mewed gently. He moved to Mousekit. "He's weak," he commented. "He might not make it through the night. And this one," he sniffed Stripekit. "He's healthy."
"Berrykit!" Flamestripe cried. Everyone whipped their heads around and stared at the sandy ginger queen. "Berrykit's missing!"
A few heartbeats later, Swifttail, the deputy and Flamestripe's mate, burst in. "What do you mean 'missing'?" he yelped.
"She's gone! Her scent leads away!" she answered. Stormfeather looked at Whiteshade, horrified.
"I'll find her!" Swifttail meowed, and raced away. Stormfeather heard Cedarfoot meow, "I'll go with him!" The two toms disappeared out of the camp. The whole Clan was stressing, and even Turtlestar had emerged from his den to check on everyone. They all waited anxiously for Swifttail and Cedarfoot to return with Berrykit.

The moon was sinking down, and the rain had stopped when Whiteshade scented Cedarfoot and Swifttail. There was a faint scent of Thunderpath mingled with them. He hoped that Berrykit hasn't been killed. He followed Flamestripe out into the clearing with Branchkit trailing behind them. He gasped in shock when he saw Swifttail, mangled and bloody, lying on the ground. Berrykit sat by his side, whimpering and crying. Flamestripe wailed at the top of her lungs and collapsed beside her mate.
"StarClan no! Please no! It's not his time!" she cried. Branchkit sat beside his sister and started grieving for his father.
Mosssting padded over to them. "What happened?" he asked Cedarfoot.
"It's those blasted twolegs! They put the old Thunderpath back in use. Berrykit found her way onto it. Swifttail chased her onto the path and grabbed her scruff, that's when the monster appeared. He

threw Berrykit to me just before the monster hit him. I dragged him back." His voice caught in his throat as he told the story. "I had to watch the whole thing!" he cried. Mosssting led him away to his den. Turtlestar was already at Flamestripe's side.
"I know it's hard, it's okay," he meowed sympathetically. He padded over to Highledge and jumped up. Everyone was already in the clearing, so he started his announcement. "I say these words before StarClan, so that Swifttail can hear and approve my words. The new deputy of ThunderClan is Flamestripe."
The tabby she-cat gasped, but nodded, and went back to grieving her mate.
Stormfeather looked at her two surviving kits. "I'll protect you with my life, little ones."

Chapter one

Stripekit snuggled into Stormfeather's grey fur.
"Come on Stripekit," she crooned. "It's time for you to explore the camp! Aren't you excited?"
Stripekit shook his head and buried himself further into his mother's fur, the scent of milk filling his nostrils. He felt jaws clamp down on his fluffy scruff and pull him up. He let out a squeal of protest.
"No! It's scary outside! Don't want to go!" He cried, flailing his paws around. Stormfeather scoffed and padded out of the nursery with him dangling from her jaws.
As they left the dark nursery, sunlight flooded over Stripekit, making him squint his eyes and squirm even more. "It's too bright!" He mewed in protest when Stormfeather placed him on the ground.
"Too bad," she said, amused. She grabbed a twig in her mouth and dropped it at Stripekit's paws. "Look! It's a twig! Want to play?" She meowed and lowered herself to the ground, swishing her tail from side to side. Stripekit brightened up and pounced at the twig, batting at it with his light grey paws. He had started to nibble on it when a cat-shaped shadow loomed over him. He turned around and looked up to see a handsome white tom with amber eyes staring at him.
"Hello, Stripekit!" The tom meowed. "I'm Whiteshade, you're father."
Stormfeather purred and nuzzled her mate. "Stripekit is nearly three moons old, and I've finally convinced him to come explore the camp," she meowed.
"You dragged me out here!" Stripekit cried. Stormfeather flicked his ear and went back to talking to Whiteshade. *I guess I'll explore on my own,* he thought to himself, still pouting. He padded into the clearing in the centre of camp and sat among a group of cats all clustered at the bottom of a ledge sticking out of the cliff face. A grey tom with a black patch on his back and amber eyes was standing on the ledge, looking down at a sandy ginger tabby she-cat.
"Alright, Buzzardwish, Hazelpaw, and Mistpetal, you can go on the border patrol. I will take Berrypaw and Cedarfoot with me for a hunting patrol. The rest of of you are dismissed," the ginger tabby

meowed.
Stripekit wondered what was happening and padded over to the ginger tabby.
"Hello! I'm Stripekit!" He mewed, remembering what Stormfeather had told him about being confident. The tabby she-cat turned around and smiled at him.
"Well hello Stripekit! I remember when you were born, you little kit," she mewed affectionately. Stripekit looked at her, bewildered. The tabby laughed. "I'm a good friend of your mother's, and I was a queen when she had you, but Berrypaw and Branchpaw are apprentices now. I'm Flamestripe, the deputy, by the way." She flicked his ear with her tail and padded out of the camp with two other cats following her, presumably Berrypaw and Cedarfoot. He watched them as they made their way to the thorn tunnel, and a moment before they left, he raced after them.
"Flamestripe! Can I come with you?" he pleaded, widening his eyes. Flamestripe smiled at him and lowered herself to his height.
"Oh little one, when you're an apprentice yes, but you're too young and little. Don't worry, everyone gets to explore the territory at some time." She flicked her ears and led her patrol out of the camp. Stripekit sighed and trotted back towards the nursery. Stormfeather and Whiteshade were now sitting together, sharing a rabbit. He climbed on top of Stormfeather and and reared onto his hind paws and placed his forepaws on top of her head.
"When can I have fun?" he mewed and placed his chin on his mother's head. A purr rumbled in Stormfeather's throat and she swished her tail from side to side.
"You can have plenty of fun when you're an apprentice darling one," she told him and took another bite of the rabbit. Stripekit rolled off his mother's back and placed himself right at her paws.
"What about playmates? Will I ever have any? Did I ever have any?" He looked seriously into her brown eyes and waited for an answer. Stormfeather exchanged a sad glance with her mate and looked back at Stripekit with emotion welling in her eyes.
"You did actually. Two other kits; a white one and a brown tabby. The tabby was a beautiful she-kit and the white one was a tom, the spitting image of his father." Her voice cracked with emotion, but she gulped and continued. "We named the tabby Fernkit and the white one was Mousekit. Fernkit wasn't breathing when she was born, her lips were already blue, and Mousekit died during the

night; he was the runt and was too weak. We knew he wouldn't make it. Willownose and Whiteshade buried the two of them in the morning after we sat a short vigil." Stormfeather's tail quivered and her cheeks were damp, her eyes still filled with tears. Stripekit looked down at his paws.
"I'm sorry," he mewed with guilt.
"For what?" Stormfeather cried. "We're so thankful that you survived, you have no reason to be sorry."
Stripekit nodded and put his chin on his paws. "Couldn't Mosssting do anything?" he asked, looking back at his mother. She shook her head.
"He may be medicine cat, but he's not a miracle worker."
"If I were medicine cat, I wouldn't let that happen!" he squeaked with anger. Whiteshade laid his tail on his kit's shoulder.
"It's not his fault," he whispered to the kit. Stripekit's tail quivered and he raced over to the medicine den. He burst through the entrance and stopped for a moment, letting his eyes adjust to the dim light. The grey medicine cat turned around, confusion sparkling in his deep green eyes.
"Ugh, hello Stripe-"
He was cut off as Stripekit charged at him and started pummelling him with his soft hind paws.
"What in the name of StarClan?" he meowed as Stormfeather and Whiteshade entered the den. Stormfeather dipped her head apologetically and grabbed Stripekit by the scruff.
"That's for Fernkit and Mousekit!" he cried in a mixture of sorrow and anger. Anger flared in Mosssting's green eyes.
"How dare you!"
Stripekit squeaked in fright and brought his paws up to his face and covered his eyes.
"I should've retired to the elder's den moons ago, so I'm not as young and spritely as I used to be and there was nothin' I could've done for those kits!" His tail was swinging from side to side in frustration as he growled at the kit. Whiteshade stepped forward and placed his tail on Mosssting's shoulder.
"I'm so sorry about Stripekit, we knew he wouldn't take the news too well but this," he turned and looked at his kit, "was unacceptable."
The grey tabby hung his head in shame. "Sorry," he mumbled.
Mosssting shook his head.

"Make sure this doesn't happen again," he grumbled and went back to sorting herbs. Stormfeather nodded and wrapped her fluffy tail around Whiteshade, then pricked her ears and placed Stripekit down on the ground.
"I know how he can make it up to you," she mewed, starting to get excited.
"You do?" Mosssting, Whiteshade and Stripekit all said in unison.
Stormfeather nodded. "He can help you sort your herbs! You look like you have a bit of work to do and I can assure you he'll behave." She shot a glare at her kit and he smiled innocently.
Mosssting was sceptical about the idea, and thought about for a few moments before responding. "Alright, I could use the help, and you two have warrior duties to take care of. Come on Stripekit." He flicked his tail and Stripekit reluctantly padded closer to him.
Stormfeather and Whiteshade both dipped their heads and padded out of the den.
For a while, the grey medicine cat was silent as he pushed herbs around into small piles.
"You know, you seem like a pawful for your parents," he meowed at last, breaking the silence. Stripekit looked up and glared at him. "I don't have to be here, I'm not a medicine cat and I never will be, I'm going to be a warrior!" He wanted to leave, but he sat still, knowing he would get in trouble. Mosssting rolled his eyes and turned to the kit.
"Too bad, you're here now and you're helping me whether you like it or not," he rasped. Stripekit rolled his eyes. I'd rather take the or not.
He padded over to the medicine cat. "Fine, lets get this over with," he meowed and looked at the herbs scattered on the floor.
Mosssting crouched down and placed two types of leaves at Stripekit's paws.
"This one," he pointed with his paw to a small, prickly leaf, "is a blackberry leaf. We use it to stop the swelling of infections, especially bee stings, which we get a fair few of in Newleaf. And this one," he pointed to the fluffy, green leaf, "is borage. It's for nursing queens to give them more milk and is good for fevers."
Stripekit sighed with boredom. "Save the lecture please and tell me what to do," he mewed impatiently. Mosssting huffed in exasperation.
"Find these two types of leaves and sort them into piles." Stripekit

grumbled but started to do as he was told. He picked up as many borage leaves as he could fit in his mouth and put them in a small, neat pile and went back for more. The fluffy leaves tickled his nose and he let out a small sneeze. He finally finished gathering all of the borage leaves and started on the blackberry leaves. He sniffed around the den for them and when he came across one, he picked it up in his jaws.
"Ow!" He recoiled and dropped the leaf as it stung his lip.
"I told you they're prickly," Mosssting meowed in amusement.
Stripekit glared at him and rubbed his lower lip with his paw.
Mosssting flicked the kit's ear with his tail and went on sorting his own herbs. Stripekit sat pouting for a moment, then went on finding blackberry leaves. He was careful to keep his lips away from them and only used his small teeth.
After spending all day in the medicine den, Stripekit was exhausted. He admitted he didn't mind it too much and loved the scent of herbs. He just wanted to roll around in them all day. Through all of their scents, he didn't notice Stormfeather's sweet scent enter the den.
"Hello," she meowed. Stripekit whipped around in surprise.
"Stormfeather, you startled me!" he squeaked.
"Oh I'm sorry little one," she mewed kindly and swished her tail around him. "I trust he wasn't too much trouble?" She looked at Mosssting expectantly. He shook his head.
"He was a delight to have, and very helpful and talented. You shouldn't waste that talent on being a warrior," he meowed as Stormfeather padded out of the den with Stripekit trailing behind.
'No way!' he thought. 'I'm going to be an amazing warrior.'

Chapter two

[image] [image]

"Hazelpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" Turtlestar meowed, standing at the base of Highledge. Hazelpaw puffed out her chest.
"I do!" Hazelpaw meowed firmly. Turtlestar bowed his head.
"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Hazelpaw, from this moment you will be known as Hazelbelly. StarClan honours your intelligence and patience, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan." He padded up to the new warrior and placed his nose on her brown head. She licked his shoulder in return and whipped around to face the Clan. They greeted her with loud cheers, calling her new name.
"Hazelbelly! Hazelbelly! Hazelbelly!"
Stripekit happily joined in with the calling of the new warrior's name. He started to think of what he would be named when he became a warrior. His apprentice ceremony would be in a few sunrises.
Three moons had passed since he was forced to help Mosssting, and he had gone to help him almost every day. He kept telling himself it was just to pass the time, and that he would be a warrior, not a medicine cat. But he couldn't deny the itch of longing to spend all day sorting herbs.
A thick layer of snow covered the ground where he sat. His paws were soggy and snow clogged his claws. He shivered as more snow started to fall. It was his first Leaf-bare since he was born and he still wasn't sure he liked it. There was never much prey on the fresh-kill pile. He was reminded of that as his belly rumbled with hunger.
Whiteshade, who was sitting behind him, nudged him along to Hazelbelly. Stripekit padded over to her. "Congratulations!" he mewed to the new warrior. She smiled and licked his head between his ears.
"Thank you Stripekit. One day, that'll be you," she meowed encouragingly. Stripekit puffed his chest with pride. He would be a

great warrior! Wouldn't he?

As Stripekit lay beside his mother in the nursery, he let out a small cough. Stormfeather looked at him worriedly.
"Are you okay?" she mewed, concern in her voice. Stripekit nodded and stretched.
"I just need some fresh air, I've been sitting in the nursery since Hazelbelly's warrior ceremony earlier today." He churned his paws in the air with boredom.
"Well I don't want you to catch a cold!" Stormfeather fretted, licking her kit's pelt.
"Stop fussing over me!" He pushed her away.
"Okay then, come one." She led the grey tabby out of the nursery and into the clearing. The weak Leaf-bare sun bathed his fur, and he relished the warmth. He watched as a patrol consisting of Cedarfoot, Whiteshade and Gingerclaw entered the camp and placed their fresh-kill on the small pile. Stripekit turned to his mother.
"Can we go out of camp?" he asked her innocently. She shook her head.
"No, I've already told so many times! Just be patient, you'll be an apprentice in a few days," she meowed.
Whiteshade padded over to them and pressed his muzzle to Stormfeather's. "I caught a rabbit!" he meowed proudly and pulled the prey off his back where it had been dangling. Stripekit jumped up with excitement.
"Finally! I'm starving!" He jumped on the rabbit and tore a chunk from it, chewing hungrily. Stormfeather chuckled and took a bite as well. "Are you going to have any?" she asked Whiteshade.
"No. You two need it more than I do," he replied, affection in his mew. Stormfeather looked at him admirably and continued eating the rabbit with Stripekit.
"You'll have to teach me to hunt, Whiteshade!" Stripekit squeaked happily. "Teach me now!"
Whiteshade smiled at his son's eagerness. "Okay, crouch down-"
"Not here!" Stripekit cut him off and raced over to the camp entrance. "Come one!" he cried and shot out of the camp.
"Stripekit!" The two parents yelped and raced after their kit.
The forest was thick with snow. Stripekit cringed as he padded through it and shook his paws every time he lifted them from the

snow. A breeze ruffled his fur. He shivered in the cold, suddenly wondering why he thought it was a good idea to venture out of camp.
"I'll find prey!" he announced to himself. That would make Whiteshade and Stormfeather proud. He trotted happily through the snow, oblivious to his parents desperate calls. As he padded on, he fell into a ditch in the ground. He yelped as he fell through the snow. It engulfed him as he fell into the hole. "Help!" he cried, frantically trying to paw his way out of the ditch. A pair of strong jaws clamped down on his scruff and pulled him up. He was placed back on to the snow beside the ditch. He looked up and saw his father's glowing amber eyes. His white fur blended in with the steadily falling snow.
"Heh, hi," Stripekit mewed nervously. Whiteshade's eyes sparked with anger and fear.
"We thought something bad would happen to you!" he quaked. Stormfeather stepped forward and brushed her muzzle against Stripekit's head.
"Thank StarClan you're safe," she muttered. She and Whiteshade exchanged a glance.
"We've decided that we may as well show you around part of the territory. Just to the lake," Whiteshade told him. Stripekit jumped up.
"Yes!" he rejoiced. "Come on!" He pelted through the forest, careful not to step in another ditch. Stormfeather raced ahead of him.
"Wait! You don't know the way!" she chuckled. Stripekit slowed down and let his parents lead the way. Soon, they came to the top of a large slope leading down to the frozen over lake.
"Cool!" Stripekit exclaimed and raced down the slope, stopping at the shore.
"Careful!" Stormfeather cried, her mew edged with worry.
Stripekit leaned over and peered through the thin ice, into the water under it. Stormfeather and Whiteshade stood on either side of him.
"Wow, it's so deep," Stripekit observed. He reached out a paw and placed it on the ice. It cracked under his little paw and he recoiled immediately. "It's cold!" he exclaimed. He looked through the small hole that had formed in the ice and stared into the deep lake. Suddenly, his paws slipped on the icy bank, and he plummeted into the water. His head hurt from banging it in the ice, and he was

shaking uncontrollably from the freezing water. He heard a splash above him and he managed to make out the blurry shape of Stormfeather. She grabbed his scruff in her jaws and they resurfaced. Stripekit gasped deeply and coughed up salty water, his throat stinging as he did. Stormfeather hauled him away from the water and he landed with a *thud* at his father's paws. He looked back at his mother who was struggling to stay afloat.
"Hold on! I'm coming!" Whiteshade shouted and leapt into the water. Stripekit gulped and watched with fright.
The two cats had stayed under the water for what seemed like a moon when he saw their pelts under the ice further in-lake where the ice was thicker. He could just make out their muffled cries as they tried to break the ice.
Stripekit trembled and hared through the forest as fast as his legs could carry him. He desperately prayed that he was heading the right way for the camp. He sighed with relief as the scents of cats bathed his tongue. He raced through the thorn tunnel and stopped in the clearing, his lungs screaming for air. His breathing was fast and ragged, and he was shaking with terror.
Flamestripe whipped around as he crashed into the camp and she ran over to him. "What's wrong?" She looked around the camp. "Where's Stormfeather and Whiteshade?" she asked, terror laced in her voice.
"They're, they're, d-drowning," he panted. "In, in, the, l-lake."
Flamestripe raced to the edge of camp where Turtlestar was sitting. He stood up and raced over to Stripekit as Flamestripe fetched warriors and Mosssting.
"Take us to them!" Flamestripe exclaimed. A patrol of her, Turtlestar, Mosssting, Buzzardwish, Mistpetal and Birchsong all followed him. He was much more aware of the cold now that he was dripping wet. Snow started to fall even heavier as they raced through the forest. The blood roared in Stripekit's ears and his heart pounded quickly in his chest. Tears streamed from his eyes as he pushed himself to run harder. *It's my fault! It's all my fault!* He nearly stopped in his tracks to wail to himself. They finally reached the edge of the trees where the ground sloped down towards the lake. The patrols streaked down, nothing but a blur of pelts. When they reached the shore, Stripekit stopped and pointed with his paw to where he had last seen his parents. Mistpetal readied herself to leap in but Turtlestar stopped her.

"I'll go, I've got lives to spare, you don't."
Birchsong stepped forward, his black and white pelt glistening in the sun. "I want to help."
Turtlestar hesitated for a moment before he nodded and leapt into the water, breaking the thin ice. Birchsong jumped in after him. The two swam side by side. They started to struggle with their swimming but they urged each other on. They continued to break the thicker ice with their paws, cracking it beneath them.
"Stop!" Stripekit cried. "That's where they were."
The two toms stopped and looked at each other, before nodding and diving in together. Mistpetal whimpered.
"He may never see his kits again," she mewed, thinking of Moonpoppy's and Birchsong's kits that had been kitted a couple of moons ago.
"I might never see my parents again!" Stripekit wailed. He silently willed that his parents would be okay, and alive. But he knew that not even StarClan could keep them alive that long. He gasped as the toms resurfaced, Stormfeather dangling from Birchsong's jaws and Whiteshade from Turtlestar's. Neither of his parents were breathing.
"No!" He dropped to the ground, the world spinning around him. He wanted to dive into the water just to be with them. The toms hauled the two warriors onto the shore, their pelts drenched and dripping. Birchsong was quivering, the cold water and snow freezing him.
"Go back to camp and warm up," Turtlestar mewed to the tom. Mistpetal and Buzzardwish followed him and they trailed back to camp.
Stripekit watched as Mosssting pushed up and down with his paws on Whiteshade's chest. Water spluttered out of his father's mouth, but his sides remained unmoving, no breath left in him. Mosssting repeated the process on Stormfeather. Water spluttered out of her mouth. Stripekit gasped in shock as she took a small, shuddering breath.
"Now I can meet Fernkit and Mousekit..." Her eyes closed slowly as the last bit of life seeped out of her.
"I'm sorry, Stripekit. They're gone." Mosssting looked solemnly at the kit.
"No!"
Stripekit sat, whimpering, for a while. He finally looked up at the cats staring at him. "If I wasn't so helpless, I might've been able to

save them!" he cried. Turtlestar placed his tail on the kit's shoulder.
"There's nothing you could've possibly done," he mewed softly. The leader led the remaining cats of the patrol back to camp, him dragging Whiteshade and Flamestripe dragging Stormfeather, and sent Stripekit to the medicine den with Mosssting. The old medicine cat gave the kit a couple of seeds.
"These are poppy seeds, they'll help with the shock and make you sleepy. Eat them and go to your nest," Mosssting instructed kindly. Stripekit numbly licked up the seeds and padded to the nursery. Moonpoppy sat up when he walked in.
"What's wrong?" she asked, wrapping her tail around Leopardkit and Rosekit. Stripekit ignored her and dropped down into his nest. Crying himself to sleep, he willed himself to wake up in StarClan, where he could hopefully be with his parents.

Moonpoppy sat grooming Stripekit as if he were her own kit, readying him for his apprentice ceremony. He fidgeted under the silver tabby's hold, wishing it was his own mother grooming him. He let out a small whimper and his vision blurred with tears. Leopardkit, his redish-brown and grey spotted pelt shining in the half-light, looked up at Stripekit.
"What's wrong? You're becoming an apprentice! That's exciting! I have to wait four more moons," he mewed grumpily.
"It'll happen soon enough," Stripekit grunted. Rosekit licked her light grey fur.
"Leave him alone mouse-brain!" She flicked her brother's ear and pulled him away from Stripekit. He sighed and slumped down.
"Come now! I just groomed your fur!" Moonpoppy growled. Stripekit glared at her and bared his teeth.
"Leave me alone, you're not my mother!" he snapped. Leopardkit jumped forward.
"Hey! Don't speak to her like that! She may not be your mother but she's mine!" he growled at Stripekit. The grey tabby rolled his eyes and pushed Leopardkit away. A yowl rang through the camp.
"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge!"
"Ready?" Moonpoppy asked Stripekit. He nodded, and slowly trailed after her into the clearing, where he sat at the base of Highledge. It only took a few moments for the rest of the Clan to gather. He could hear their whispers as they gathered around him.

"I've never seen a kit so sad about becoming a 'paw."
"The poor thing, still grieving for Whiteshade and Stormfeather."
"I wonder if he'll cope as an apprentice."
Turtlestar hushed them all with a flick of his tail. "Stripekit, come forward."
He stepped forward, numb to the world around him.
"You have reached the age of six moons and it's time you became an apprentice. Until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Stripepaw."
Stripepaw suddenly felt the urge to say something.
"Your mentor will be Cedar-"
"I want to be a medicine cat!" he blurted out. Everyone gasped and stared at him. Turtlestar tilted his head to one side, a look of confusion spreading across his face.
"Why?" he asked the young cat.
Stripepaw gulped and took in a big breath. "Because, having to watch my parents die like that, knowing I could've done something, made me feel so useless. I want to be able to help my Clanmates, not be the cause of their death. And, I'll admit, I've had fun helping Mosssting these past few moons."
Turtlestar smiled and exchanged a look with Mosssting. "Very well. You will travel to the Moonpool with Mosssting in a few days time, when it is half-moon."
Stripepaw smiled and dipped his head to his leader. He like felt a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders, as if his parents had been sitting there, waiting for him to choose his destiny. He knew he'd picked the right one. Turtlestar leapt down and touched his nose to Stripepaw's head.
"That was a very brave thing to do," he meowed softly the new apprentice. The leader flicked his tail toward the Clan. They erupted with cheers.
"Stripepaw! Stripepaw! Stripepaw!" He felt his heart thumping as his Clanmates called his name. He padded over to Leopardkit, who was staring at him in awe.
"Why?" the kit squeaked. "Why would you want to be a crumby medicine cat? That's gross!" He stuck his tongue out. Rosekit pounced on her brother, silencing him as she shoved his head into the snow.
"Oh shut up, you!" she meowed with amusement. Stripepaw padded away toward Mosssting. The old cat had a sly glint in his green

eyes.
"I knew you'd come to your senses soon. Didn't know it would be a heart-beat before you became a warrior apprentice though," he chuckled. Stripepaw chuckled along with him.
"Well, I'm glad I came to my senses."

Chapter three

[image]

Stripepaw woke up, screaming. Ever since Stormfeather's and Whiteshade's death four sunrises ago, he hadn't gotten even one night of decent sleep. He breathed in the scent of herbs, calming himself down. He was hot all over, yet he was shivering. Images of Stormfeather's and Whiteshade's sodden corpses still flashed in his mind. He buried his face in his nest, muffling his second scream. He didn't realise that Mosssting was standing over him until his grey tail swept over Stripepaw's back.
"Come now, it's okay," he crooned. Stripepaw whimpered and looked up at the old medicine cat. His green eyes were soft and understanding. "We'll be going to the Moonpool tonight, that's good, right?" Mosssting meowed, trying to cheer up the grey tabby.
Stripepaw looked up at him. "Nothing will cheer me up, so stop trying," he grumbled, reading the old cat's thoughts.
"That's enough!" Mosssting grabbed Stripepaw by the scruff and hauled him out of his nest, grunting. "You've been sleeping in 'til Sunhigh every day, and you scream in your sleep." He lowered himself to the small apprentice's height. "I know this is hard to deal with, I've gone through the same thing. My mother was slain by a fox when I was barely out of kit hood." His voice caught in his throat with emotion. Stripepaw felt a pang of guilt. "But, I focused on my work and becoming the best medicine cat I could, and I got used to it. Then, my father, Ashstep, died of greencough a few moons after I got my full name." He let out a long sigh. "But that was many, many moons ago. I'm almost too old to even remember!" he chuckled. Stripepaw shifted uncomfortably in his nest. He realised that he hadn't been very respectful to his mentor these past few days. He touched his nose the old cat's nose and smiled.
"I'm sorry, you're right. I need to focus more," he mewed, looking into Mosssting's green eyes. Mosssting smiled and stood up.
"How about we go collect some herbs? We're running especially low on catmint, which isn't good at this time in leaf-bare." He flicked his tail along Stripepaw's spine and padded out of the den. Stripepaw nodded and followed him out of the den. A sharp, ice cold wind hit

his face. Snowflakes whirled around him, making his pelt damp. He shivered and started to retreat back into the den. Mosssting shot him a stern look and flicked his ears. Stripepaw rolled his eyes and padded back out, standing strong against the cool wind. It buffeted his fur around. He shivered once more and followed his mentor through the camp. Every cat he passed gave him a strange look. He looked questioningly at Moonpoppy, who was staring at him, and padded over to her.
"Why is everyone looking at me like that?" he asked her softly.
"This is the first time you've been out of the den since...well..." She trailed off and looked up at the grey sky. Leopardkit jumped out from behind her.
"Hi Stripepaw! You're still alive!" he mewed happily. Rosekit cuffed him over the ear.
"Shut up you!" she scolded. Leopardkit trudged to the back of the den, disappearing into the shadows. Stripepaw stared, shocked, at Moonpoppy.
"Did-did they think I was d-dead?" he choked.
"Goodness no! They're just kits, don't mind them," Moonpoppy meowed quickly. Stripepaw nodded and padded back to Mosssting, who was waiting for him in the clearing.
"You ready to go?" the old cat asked. Stripepaw nodded, putting on a brave face. He was still thinking of his parents, their desperate cries to be freed from under the ice. He shook his head to clear it and padded after Mosssting into the forest.
The air out of the camp was crisp and sharp, stinging Stripepaw's nose. Snowflakes fell softly around him. Mosssting chuckled and batted at one, making it crumble under his paw. Stripepaw stared at him.
"You're acting like a kit," he grumbled. Mosssting laughed again.
"Why don't you try?" he meowed. Stripepaw flicked his tail with irritation.
"I haven't time for kit games," he mewed.
"You're already as grumpy as a full medicine cat!" Mosssting joked. Stripepaw shot a furious glance at him, but continued walking, swishing his tail behind him.
Mosssting didn't know it, but Stripepaw was fiercely holding back his tears. This was the part of the forest where he had first fallen into the ditch. Whiteshade had easily helped him out of it. It was one other part of his father that he missed; his heroism. And

Stormfeather's love and kindness. He couldn't take it anymore and he collapsed to the ground, whimpering and sobbing.
"I can't! I just can't!" he cried. Mosssting looked at him, confused. Stripepaw stared into his dark green eyes, before standing up and tearing through the forest, down to the icy bank of the lake. He cracked the ice with his paw, like he had done when he first came there. He gazed at his reflection in the water. He had his mother's soft brown eyes, and his father's ears and small nose. And, he could've sworn he'd seen his mother's starry figure in the water, staring up at him. He jumped back in fright, not daring to look back in. Tears began to pool down his face. His whiskers trembled as he shivered.
"I'm sorry, it's all my fault," he whispered.
"No it's not."
Stripepaw whipped around and saw Mosssting looking down at him with sympathy.
"Come on, we need to get the the old Twoleg nest," the old cat meowed. Stripepaw nodded solemnly, and stood up and trudged behind the medicine cat.

Stripepaw cringed as a horrible sharp scent hit him. He looked up at Mosssting. "What in StarClan is the stench?" he croaked.
"The old Thunderpath," Mosssting sighed. "Maybe three, four seasons ago, before you were born, it was put into use again. When the ancient Clans first arrived here, led by Firestar, Leopardstar, Blackstar and Tallstar, it was abandoned. But slowly, monsters found their way onto the path, and they go down to the lake. But only really in new-leaf and green-leaf."
Stripepaw twitched his nose at the prospect of having to cross the Thunderpath. It was leaf-bare though, surely there wouldn't be any monsters on it?
Mosssting led him through the forest until they came to a dirt path that reeked of the same smell Stripepaw had caught earlier. Mosssting looked both ways, then nodded to Stripepaw.
"It's clear." And with that, he bounded across the small path over to the other side. Stripepaw gulped and followed his mentor. He reached the other side safely, like he had hoped.
The two cats padded through the thick undergrowth for a little while longer until they came across the abandoned Twoleg nest. Its walls were crumbling and the roof had completely caved in. It was

just the way that Stormfeather had described it. Stripepaw sighed, thinking of his mother, but continued following Mosssting up the path to the nest.
"Now, the catmint grows at the front of the nest, in what used to be a garden. In leaf-bare, there's not much of it, but we need all that it can offer," Mosssting explained. Stripepaw nodded and padded up to the patch of green. There was only a small section of catmint, but it was good enough. He bent down and started to nip the stalks of the plant, making a small pile of it as he went. He pricked his ears as he heard a rustle coming from the Twoleg nest. He looked up suspiciously and padded over to the nest, wanting to inspect the sound. It couldn't of been Mosssting, he was collecting catmint alongside him. He peered into the darkness, sticking his nose in to sniff. A strange scent that he only barely recognised crossed his nose. *That can't be right,* he thought. He squinted, desperately trying to see into the darkness, but gave up after a few moments. He shook his head and padded back to where he was collecting his herbs. He went to pick up his pile of catmint, but his eyes widened with shock when he saw his pile had disappeared. He looked over at Mosssting.
"Hey Mosssting? Did you by any chance take my pile?" he meowed.
Mosssting shook his head and went back to collecting the herb.
Stripepaw looked around suspiciously and drew in the scents. It was hard to distinguish them from each other; the scent of catmint was so overpowering, but he managed to catch one other scent. It was the same one he found in the Twoleg nest. He gasped with realisation and turned around to shout to Mosssting, but was silenced as something, or rather, someone, landed on his back, forcing him to the ground. His mouth was pushed into the ground, muffling his shouts for help. He writhed under the weight, and managed to shift around to stare at the cat on him. It was Badgerflame, the ShadowClan deputy. He was right! He knew he had scented ShadowClan earlier, and now they were stealing his catmint! He desperately wriggled underneath Badgerflame's paws, but she was much bigger than the scrawny apprentice.
"Mosssting!" he cried out. The old cat whipped around, only to have two other cats, a cream-and-apricot tabby tom and a greenish-grey tom, tackle him to the ground.
"What in StarClan!" Mosssting yelped. Badgerflame nudged Stripepaw to his paws, forcing him to walk ahead of her as she padded to the ThunderClan medicine cat.

"We need your catmint!" she growled. "We have sick cats, and our supply is *gone!*"
"Well you could've simply asked! What about Leapwing? This is her job!" Mosssting replied.
"That's none of you business! Now we'll take your catmint and be on our way!" she snarled. She padded away from the two ThunderClan cats, and the cream-and-apricot tabby grabbed Mosssting's pile and stalked after his Clan mates.
"What was that about?" Stripepaw meowed, still bewildered after what had just happened.
"They took all of our catmint. The piles that we gathered were the last of the good parts, we have none left," Mosssting grunted.
Stripepaw sighed.
"I can bet that Leapwing is sick," he meowed. Mosssting nodded.
"We'll hopefully see her at the Moonpool tonight, then we'll ask," Mosssting concluded, and started to pad away, back to camp.
Stripepaw glanced at the Twoleg nest one last time, then padded after his mentor into the snowy undergrowth.

Chapter four

[image]

Stripepaw smiled for the first time in days as he padded alongside Mosssting on their way to the Moonpool. He was looking forward to becoming a true medicine cat apprentice, and meeting the other medicine cats, and speaking with StarClan! Then a thought crossed his mind. *What if I see Stormfeather and Whiteshade?* He started to make up scenarios in his head about what would happen, and how it would happen. He was so wrapped up in his world that he hadn't noticed that Mosssting had stopped. Stripepaw bumped into the back of his mentor, knocking him forward. Mosssting turned around and glared at Stripepaw.
"Watch your paws!" he growled. Stripepaw hung his head.
"Sorry," he mewed. He looked up and saw another cat, and old, light grey she-cat, talking with Mosssting. She dipped her head to Stripepaw.
"Hello, you must be Mosssting's new apprentice! I'm Rainsplash, the RiverClan medicine cat," she meowed. Her voice was croaky with age. Her muzzle was a few shades lighter than her pelt, showing that she was growing old. Stripepaw drew in her fishy, yet sweet, scent. Her leaf-green eyes were soft and kind as they gazed upon Stripepaw. He smiled shyly at her then looked back down at his paws, which were starting to be buried in snow.
"Leapwing and Birchpoppy had better hurry up, or we'll be icicles when they get here!" Rainsplash exclaimed. Mosssting chuckled and looked at her.
"I'm sure they'll be here soon," he reassured her.
Stripepaw jumped as he heard voices behind him. He turned around and saw a beautiful golden tabby she-cat with a small red-and-brown tabby tom padding beside her.
"This is Birchpoppy and her apprentice, Mousepaw," Mosssting meowed. Birchpoppy dipped her head to Mosssting.
"Evening, Mosssting. I see you've *finally* gotten an apprentice!" she remarked with a chuckle. Mosssting nodded.
"This is Stripepaw, he's quite excited, as you can see," the ThunderClan cat replied sarcastically, flicking Stripepaw as he

shivered and trembled in the cold. Birchpoppy smiled and gave a mrrrow of laughter.
The five cats stood there for a while, waiting for Leapwing and Greypaw from ShadowClan. Their pelts had frost clinging to them and their noses were starting to turn blue.
"This is ridiculous! We need to go. They can catch up with us later, they know the way," Rainsplash meowed with impatience.
Mosssting nodded in agreement.
"Well, I suppose you're right," Birchpoppy sighed, and the medicine cats started to make their way up the hill towards the Moonpool. A rustling sounded behind them and a mottled grey she-cat with stunning light blue eyes bounded over to them.
"I'm, s-sorry, I'm, l-late," she panted. "I-I had to r-run all the way, from ShadowClan," she meowed, taking breaths between her words.
"That's fine. Where's Leapwing?" Rainsplash asked, concern laced in her voice.
"She's sick," Greypaw replied. "She wasn't strong enough to make the journey, so I came alone."
Rainsplash nodded and padded to the front of the group and led them to the Moonpool. The three apprentices trailed behind the older cats. Mousepaw and Greypaw stood close to each other, chatting away, while they left Stripepaw behind them by himself. He noticed that Greypaw towered over Mousepaw, and was even the same height as the older cats. She must've been close to getting her medicine cat name. Suddenly, she cocked her head around and smiled at Stripepaw.
"C'mon! Join us," she meowed sweetly. Stripepaw smiled awkwardly and padded up to them. "What's your name?" she asked when he caught up.
"Stripepaw. You?"
"I'm Greypaw, and this is Mousepaw," she meowed, flicking her tail at the red-and-brown tabby. Stripepaw dipped his head to both of them. Mousepaw flicked his grey ears in return. The scent of wind and rabbits coming from him was very prominent, and Stripepaw felt like backing away a little bit.
"So, what made you decide to become a medicine cat?" Greypaw continued. Stripepaw sighed and told her the story of how his parents had drowned just a few days before, and how he loved to help in the medicine den. By the time he was finished talking, his eyes were glistening with tears. Greypaw placed her fluffy, mottled

grey tail on his shoulder.
"I'm so sorry to hear that," she meowed with sympathy. "You know, I have an interesting story as well. My mother is Goldenlake, who was once a RiverClan warrior. Her father is Flowingstar. But she fell in love with Mistyair, a ShadowClan cat. Then, when she found out she was having me and my brother, she left to join my father. None of my Clan mates accepted me, or even liked me. So I decided to become a medicine cat to earn their respect. I never realised how much I would love it!" Her face lit up as she told her story.
Stripepaw smiled at her. Forbidden love was always a great story to him, but it broke the warrior code. She smiled back at him, then looked over at Mousepaw.
"Tell him about you!" she meowed. The red-and-brown tabby rolled his eyes and smiled.
"Well," he began, "I originally was training to be a warrior. But I soon realised that it wasn't for me, so I asked Ebonystar if I could become Birchpoppy's apprentice, and she said yes! So here I am," he meowed happily. Greypaw giggled sweetly and looked back ahead at the path.
Stripepaw followed her gaze and gasped as he saw the entrance to the Moonpool. He followed the older medicine cats and smiled as they came to the beautiful pool. The cats surrounded it and all looked down into the water, before Mosssting cleared his throat and looked up at the stars.
"Stripepaw, is it your wish to enter the mysteries of StarClan as a medicine cat?"
Stripepaw was taken by surprise as his name was called, but quickly snapped to attention. "It is."
Mosssting nodded.
"Then come forward," he meowed. Stripepaw smiled and stepped forward. "Warriors of StarClan, I present you with this apprentice. He has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant him your wisdom and insight so that he may understand your ways and heal his Clan in accordance with your will." Mosssting beckoned him toward the Moonpool. "Drink," he instructed.
Stripepaw smiled and nodded, before sitting down beside the pool and lapped a few drops from it. The other cats all smiled at him.
"Stripepaw! Stripepaw! Stripepaw!" they all chanted. Everyone did the same as Stripepaw and sat down beside the pool, trying to doze off. Stripepaw could hardly keep still because he was so nervous. He

quickly shook his head and placed his chin on his paws, waiting for sleep to pull him in.

Stripepaw opened his eyes, expecting to see the glistening pool in front of him, but instead woke up in a starry clearing, with cats watching him from all sides. Their pelts were translucent and had stars laced through them, and Stripepaw knew where he was.
"StarClan," he breathed. He looked around anxiously, trying to find his beloved parents. He couldn't see them anywhere. He was about to give up when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He whizzed around and almost immediately started crying at the sight; Stormfeather and Whiteshade both looking at him with pride in their eyes. Stripepaw bounded forward and rubbed his nose into his mother's soft fur, relishing the feeling.
"Stormfeather, I've missed you so much! And Whiteshade," he meowed and nuzzled his father.
"We're so proud of you. We knew this was your destiny," the white tom meowed, affection in his mew. Stormfeather nodded in agreement, tears glistening in her eyes.
"We just wish we could be with you," she meowed. Stripepaw opened his mouth to talk but stopped when he noticed two little kits in front of him; a tabby she-cat and a white tom.
"Fernkit and Mousekit..." He trailed off. Stormfeather looked down at them.
"Kits, meet your brother, Stripepaw." She beamed with pride. The two kits hurled themselves at the grey tabby and tackled him to the ground.
"Our brother is a medicine cat!" Mousekit cried.
"That's awesome!" Fernkit mewed. Stripepaw wanted to cherish this moment forever, but the four cats started to fade away.
"No! Stormfeather! Whiteshade! Don't go!" he cried. But it was no use; they faded into the stars and he woke up thrashing beside the Moonpool. His face was damp with tears, but he wasn't sad. He knew this was his destiny. This was the path he was meant to take.

"Bye Greypaw! Bye Mousepaw!" Stripepaw bid farewell to his new friends as they padded back to their own territories. Mosssting said goodbye to the older medicine cats then called out to Greypaw, "Send my best wishes to Leapwing!" The mottled grey she-cat flicked her tail to signal she had heard him and continued on to

ShadowClan.
Stripepaw padded silently beside Mosssting, staring down at his paws.
"So, you and Greypaw seemed to get along well," Mosssting meowed, breaking the silence. Stripepaw nodded.
"Yeah, she's nice," he mewed. "So's Mousepaw. He told me he was originally a warrior apprentice. And did you know Greypaw is half RiverClan?" he started to get carried away and meowed on.
"Yes, I already knew all those things," Mosssting interrupted.
Stripepaw smiled bashfully and stopped talking.
Stripepaw decided to talk again as they neared the camp. "In my dream, I saw-"
"We don't speak about our dreams at the Moonpool," Mosssting cut him off.
"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Stripepaw mewed, stumbling over his paws. "There's still so many things I don't know about being a medicine cat!"
"That's alright, you'll learn," Mosssting meowed reassuringly.
Stripepaw nodded and continued to pad through the snow-covered forest. The half moon was still shining brightly in the sky, turning his grey pelt to silver. It had stopped snowing while they were at the Moonpool and there were no clouds in the sky. New-leaf would be there soon.
Stripepaw was starting to feel drowsy when they finally made it back to camp. Browntail was sitting as the guard outside the camp, making sure there was no danger. He greeted the medicine cats with a curt nod and went back to watching for danger.
"Well I'm tuckered out," Mosssting mewed as he padded into the den. Stripepaw nodded and collapsed in his nest. It was so soft and warm, he had missed it all day. He hoped his dreams would be just as warm. But his sleep was interrupted as someone padded into the den.
"Mosssting!"
Stripepaw recognised the sweet voice of Rosekit and padded over to her.
"What's wrong Rosekit?" he asked her sleepily.
"I have a thorn in my paw!" she complained. The grey medicine cat finally emerged and looked at the pale grey kit.
"Ah, the classic 'thorn in paw', we'll sort this out," he croaked, padding over to Rosekit. "Hold out your paw, pad facing up," he

instructed. The kit complied, showing her paw to the medicine cat. Mosssting turned to face Stripepaw. "Now, lick the area where the thorn is to loosen it, then grasp it in your teeth and pull."
Stripepaw nodded and licked Rosekit's pad carefully. He could see her wincing in pain as his rough tongue rasped over her sore pad. He felt bad, but clasped his teeth around the thorn, which was sticking out of her paw now. He hesitated a moment, then pulled back firmly. He felt the thorn dislodge itself and fly out of the kit's paw. She squealed in pain and started licking her paw rapidly. She looked up at Stripepaw with pained eyes.
"That hurt!" she squeaked.
"I'm sorry, but think of how much more it would've hurt if it was left in and you got an infection! That wouldn't be good," he meowed, trying to calm her down. She whimpered and nodded.
"I guess you're right," she mewed. She leaned up and licked his cheek, before disappearing out of the den and back to the nursery.
"How adorable," Mosssting mewed. Stripepaw glanced at him with a smile and settled back into his nest, curling up with his tail wrapped over his nose.

{Woah, I can't believe I managed to get two chapters up in one day! That's basically a record for me! I'm a slow writer so updates will be slow, but this story is really fun to write! I'll hopefully have it done by the end of Feb! Thanks for reading the story so far, I appreciate it!}

Chapter five

[image]

Stripepaw sniffed around the tree trunk. Mosssting had sent him out to look for borage, but he hadn't had much luck, as most of it was buried under the snow. He drew in another large sniff, accidentally getting some snow stuck in his nose. He twitched his nose for a moment before sneezing, and went back to looking for the borage. Then, a new scent mingled in. But one he knew well; ThunderClan, and it was fresh. Someone had been there recently, maybe passing through. He was near the lake, maybe someone needed to go down. He looked around quizzically and scented the air once more, trying to figure out who it was. Then it become clear; Browntail. But why was he down here? He followed Browntail's scent trail, trying to figure out why he was heading down to the lake.
When he broke away from the forest and got to the top of the slope, he noticed Browntail's grey-and-brown figure sitting at the pebbly shore. But that wasn't the strange part. There were twolegs gliding on the iced-over lake. They had some strange things strapped to their bottom paws with a sharp blade on the bottom. They were all bundled up in long, fur pelts, and had fluffy things covering their ears. They looked very strange, even stranger than usual. But then he noticed a smaller shape, a very familiar shape. A cat. It was padding across the lake, which was frozen over a lot more thickly now, and was also bundled up in a fur pelt. He could just make out its own pelt colours; a light sandy-and-brown tabby, with a very thick, fluffy tail. It had a pink collar around its neck with a little golden bell that he could hear from the top of the slope.
The tabby cat made its way to the shore where Browntail was sitting, and it started nuzzling his cheek. Stripepaw gasped quietly and looked down at the warrior in shock. He needed to hear what they were saying though. He snuck down the slope, keeping close to the ground so he sunk into the snow, and hid in a small holly bush near the two conversing cats. He strained his ears to listen to them.
"-and now my people bring me down here every winter, it's a tradition," the tabby meowed. It sounded like a she-cat. Stripepaw furrowed his brows in confusion. The tabby used such strange

vocabulary. People? Winter? Were those words she picked up from her twolegs? He perked his ears to listen for more.
"Well I'm glad they bring you down here, otherwise I never would've met you!" Browntail meowed to her. Affection was evident in his voice, and he began to rasp his tongue across her cheek. She smiled and looked at him.
"I love you Browntail," she whispered. Stripepaw tried not to gasp too loudly, and he widened his eyes in shock.
"I love you too, Taylor," Browntail replied. What is he doing? Stripepaw thought. *He can't fall for a cat outside the Clan! Let alone a kittypet!* Then he remembered that for the last half-moon, Browntail had been mysteriously disappearing most days. This must've been what he was doing!
Suddenly, one of the twolegs shouted something, and Taylor frowned at Browntail.
"I have to go now, I'll meet you here tomorrow, okay?" she meowed.
Browntail nodded and licked her one last time between the ears, before she raced across the frozen lake to her twolegs.
Browntail padded away with a skip in his step and a smile plastered on his face. Stripepaw followed him silently. He contemplated whether he should make himself known to Browntail, but decided not to. He let the mottled grey-and-brown tom pad away, and he went back to searching for borage.

By the time he got back to the camp, the moon was starting to peek over the horizon. He padded into the medicine den and put his borage away in the storage compartment.
"Find much?" Mosssting asked over his shoulder.
"I got as much as I could considering it's leaf-bare. It was all buried in snow," he meowed in reply. Mosssting nodded and went back to sorting his herbs.
"Get some rest, you've been working all day," the old cat suggested.
"Alright." Stripepaw finished putting away the borage, then padded over to his nest. It was cold now, he hadn't been in it since dawn. But he snuggled up in it and wrapped his tail around him for extra warmth, and dozed off quite easily.
Stripepaw woke up with a jerk that night. Mosssting was fast asleep beside him, and the camp was silent, except for one cat padding around. Stripepaw cautiously looked out of the den and tried to make out who it was. The moonlight hit their pelt and he got a

glimpse of their mottled grey-and-brown pelt. *Browntail.*
He watched as the warrior padded out of the camp, giving a curt nod to Cedarfoot, who was on guard, and walked away into the forest. Stripepaw could easily bet that he was going to visit Taylor. But he wanted to confirm his suspicions. He carefully padded out of the den and into the clearing, blinking in the moonlight. He padded out of the thorn tunnel, but was stopped by a nosy Cedarfoot.
"Stripepaw! Where are you going?" he asked the apprentice.
Stripepaw stopped and flicked his tail with irritation.
"Into the forest. Where else would I be going? To the moon?" he meowed sarcastically.
"Alright, alright! No need to be rude."
"I'm a medicine cat, it's what I do," Stripepaw added with a smirk.
He padded out into the forest and silently followed Browntail's scent trail.
After a long while of following Browntail from the shadows, Stripepaw realised he was about to cross the WindClan border. He nearly gave himself away by jumping out to stop Browntail, but he held himself back. The mottled tom crossed the border and padded down to the shore of the lake. They still had the rule that cats from another Clan may pass through peacefully as long as they were at least two tail-lengths from the shore. Stripepaw frowned but followed Browntail out into the open, hoping the snow would hide him. He shuffled through, careful not to make any sounds, and followed the warrior all the way to the Twolegplace next to the Horseplace.
He watched as the light sandy-and-brown tabby named Taylor padded out and greeted her love.
"Browntail, thank you so much for coming!" she exclaimed.
"Anything for you," Browntail replied and licked her cheek. She giggled and looked at him, this time quite seriously. Her green eyes glowed in the moonlight.
"I need to tell you that I'm, well...I'm expecting your kits!" she meowed finally. Browntail stood still for a moment, before leaping into the air with joy.
"Oh StarClan Taylor! This is amazing!" he cried. Stripepaw couldn't bear to listen to Browntail breaking the warrior code anymore and ran back across the moorland, forgetting to stay close to the shore. He slowed down and started to puff. He caught his breath and continued padding on.

As he was walking, the fur on Stripepaw's neck started to rise, and his spine tingled. He quickly looked up the slope and noticed three cat silhouetted against the moonlight. The WindClan moonhigh patrol. The three cats hared down the hill towards him, and he made no attempt to move as he was pinned to the ground with fright. As they came closer, he recognised the one in the lead. His sturdy build was framed by his grey fur and dark grey legs. It was Stoneleg, the WindClan deputy. A grey-and-brown tortoiseshell she-cat and a brown tom followed him closely. They stopped in front of the medicine cat apprentice and looked at him with rage in their eyes.
"Do you think you can just stroll through another Clan's territory like that?" Stoneleg growled. Stripepaw shook his head.
"No! I w-was following a Clan mate d-down here! H-he went t-to the Twolegplace!" he stammered. The brown tom sniffed him.
"He's ThunderClan," he concluded.
"And he smells like herbs! He must be Mosssting's apprentice," the tortoiseshell added.
"Thank you Mothstorm, Breezefaith. But I could've figured that out myself," Stoneleg meowed indignantly. "Either way, you're coming with us." The deputy started to nudge Stripepaw away, in the direction Stripepaw could only guess would lead to the camp. He looked around in terror, desperately trying to free himself, but the warriors surrounded him, and they would easily be able to outrun him. But he just managed to catch a glimpse of Browntail staring at him with his glowing blue eyes. Stripepaw mouthed *get help*, and Browntail nodded in understanding. But maybe the mottled warrior wouldn't actually get help, since it was obvious Stripepaw had been spying on him. The ThunderClan cat raced off back into his own territory and the WindClan cats continued to push Stripepaw along towards their camp.

"Stripepaw! What are you doing here?" Mousepaw bounded over to Stripepaw as he entered the camp with Stoneleg, Breezefaith and Mothstorm.
"I don't even know to be honest," Stripepaw meowed sheepishly. Ebonystar padded over to them with a stern expression on her face. Stripepaw realised that he could easily see her ribs sticking out of her side. Leaf-bare was always hard on WindClan.
"Stoneleg, what is the meaning of this?" she croaked.

"We found him on our moor, I think he might've been trying to steal our herbs. He's the medicine cat apprentice," he meowed.
"ThunderClan has plenty of herbs, thank you!" Stripepaw exclaimed, defending his Clan. Ebonystar snorted and flicked her tail.
"Well I don't care right now. Give him a place to sleep and we'll sort him out in the morning," the black she-cat meowed and padded back to her nest, which was in the open, under the twinkling stars of Silverpelt.
Stoneleg flicked Mousepaw's ears and padded away.
"Well, looks like you'll be bedding with me," the red-and-brown tabby smiled. Stripepaw nodded and followed Mousepaw over to the medicine den, where he was given a spare nest to stay in. He looked across the moorland, which he could just see over the ridge of the camp. *ThunderClan, please save me.*

Chapter six

[image]

Weak dawn light poured through the crevice in the rock where the medicine cats slept. Stripepaw woke up with a start, looking around. For a moment he wondered where he was, until he remembered that he was being held prisoner in WindClan.
He grumbled and stood up, hoping the rest of the camp would be asleep so he could slip away back to his territory. He padded to the exit of the medicine den, and cautiously looked around. A few warriors were clustered in the centre of camp, with Stoneleg sorting out the dawn patrol. Mothstorm and some other orange-and-grey tabby tom padded out of camp with Stoneleg. Stripepaw took this as his opportunity to leave, and snuck out into the open, praying no one would see him. He let out a squeak as he was stopped in his tracks by someone standing on his tail. He turned around and saw the pale tortoiseshell, Breezefaith, from the previous day.
"I don't think so!" she growled. Stripepaw groaned and struggled. "Let me go! I didn't do anything to you! I just want to get back to ThunderClan!" he whined. Suddenly, he heard a small rustle in the bushes surrounding the camp. He looked up and saw the glowing amber eyes of Turtlestar. He let out a caterwauling battle cry and ThunderClan cats pooled in from every side of the camp. Breezefaith screeched and jumped away from Stripepaw as Mistpetal leapt on her, digging her thorn-sharp claws into her side. Stripepaw bounded away to the side and watched the fight go down.
"Stop!" Ebonystar cried out pleadingly. Everyone stopped and looked at her. Turtlestar padded over to her, his strong muscles rippling under his pelt. He towered over the small WindClan leader, but she stood up straight.
"Ebonystar, you held our medicine cat apprentice as a prisoner, for no reason. The medicine cats are always peaceful, and you forgot that. For all we know, you could've been hurting him, and I don't tolerate these sorts of things. You will pay." He let out another cry and leapt on the WindClan leader, and all of the warriors went back to the battle.

Stripepaw couldn't bear to watch anymore and looked away. *I caused a battle, I feel horrible. No! This is Browntail's fault! He's the one who snuck off to see a kittypet, who's expecting his kits...*
He looked back at the battle and watched as one WindClan cat clawed at Birchsong's ears. A loud screech split the air and Stripepaw quickly looked over and saw Mothstorm pinning Flamelight to the ground, his claws piercing her skin. Every warrior was battling, clawing at others, drawing blood. He watched Turtlestar's personal battle with Ebonystar. The frail black she-cat finally gave up and stared at him with defeat. She whispered something to Turtlestar that Stripepaw couldn't quite make out, and then he slashed her throat. Stripepaw flinched and jumped back. Ebonystar fell to the ground, blood gurgling at her mouth and staining the grass red.
"No!" Stoneleg cried out and raced over to his leader. "What did you do?" he yelled at Turtlestar. The leader only flicked his tail and walked away.
"Come ThunderClan. It's time we left," he meowed, slumping his shoulders. Stripepaw followed his leader and padded beside Browntail. The grey-and-brown warrior looked at him and smiled.
"Well, I got help! But that battle was a heck of a-"
"I know about Taylor and the kits," Stripepaw broke in. Browntail's eyes widened, but he shook his head.
"I have no idea what you're talking about," he mewed, not making eye contact.
"Browntail, unless my ears like to make things up, I know what I heard." Stripepaw stared at him firmly.
"Alright, you caught me. I've been sneaking off to see her for a while now. And she's expecting my kits," Browntail meowed in defeat. Stripepaw shook his head in disapproval.
"That's breaking at least two rules in the warrior code," he meowed.
"I know but-"
"Stripepaw!" A voice cut into their conversation and Stripepaw turned around and saw Hazelbelly only just managing to support a very weak Flamelight. He gave Browntail one last angry look and raced over to Hazelbelly and Flamelight.
"What's wrong with her?" Sripepaw asked.
"It was Mothstorm, he basically tore her apart!" Hazelbelly meowed sorrowfully as she supported her mother. The fiery orange she-cat had scratches covering her body from nose to tail-tip. She had a

very prominent slash on her belly, letting blood pool out.
"We need to get her back to camp," Stripepaw meowed hurriedly. He pushed against Flamelight on the other side of her and gave her more support. Following the Clan, Stripepaw and Hazelbelly half-led, half-carried Flamelight back to camp. As soon as they got there, they took her to the medicine den, where Mosssting was sorting through herbs.
"Mosssting! Come quickly!" Stripepaw called out. Mosssting turned around and raced over to them, cobwebs covering his paw. He gave the cobwebs to Stripepaw and explained what to do.
"Cover the heavily bleeding wounds first, then we'll make a poultice to stop infection, and give her some poppy seeds."
Stripepaw nodded and took the cobwebs and stuck them over Flamelight's wound on her belly. He flinched when Flamelight placed her orange paw on his light grey paw. He looked into her amber eyes and felt sympathy when he saw the pain. She shook her head and whispered, "It's my time, let me go."
Stripepaw looked over at Mosssting, and, to his surprise, the old medicine cat nodded. Hazelbelly pushed through Stripepaw and glared at him.
"Well? Don't just stand there! Help her!" she growled.
"There's nothing we can do. It's her time to go," Mosssting meowed with sympathy. Stripepaw opened his mouth to agree, but Hazelbelly snarled at him, baring her teeth, and stormed out of the den.
The two medicine cats sat by Flamelight for a while, and were interrupted when Turtlestar called a Clan meeting.
"You go, I'll stay with Flamelight," Mosssting meowed. Stripepaw nodded and padded out of the den, into the clearing where the rest of the Clan had gathered. Turtlestar had a small smile on his face, and he looked out over the clustered cats.
"WindClan has started a battle, and it could go on for a while. They will have a new leader, Stonestar, and they will be stronger than before. They will make this known at the next gathering in half a moon. But, you all fought valiantly and there are two cats that need to finally get their warrior names."
As he said the last part, Stripepaw heard a squeak come from Berrypaw and Branchpaw. The two apprentices raced to the front of the group of cats and looked up at their leader. He smiled at them and continued.

"I, Turtlestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." He looked at the two apprentices. "Berrypaw, Branchpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"
The two litter-mates exchanged excited glances and both nodded.
"I do!" Berrypaw meowed enthusiastically.
"I do," Branchpaw meowed softly but firmly. Turtlestar nodded.
"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Berrypaw, from this moment on, you'll be known as Berryclaw. StarClan honours you bravery and determination. Branchpaw, from this moment on, you'll be known as Branchheart. StarClan honours your skill and intelligence." He jumped down from the Highledge and landed gracefully in front of the new warriors. He placed his nose on each of their heads in turn. They both licked his shoulder in respect and turned around to face the Clan.
"Berryclaw! Branchheart! Berryclaw! Branchheart!" The Clan erupted with cheer for the new warriors, who had always been quite popular in the Clan. All was quite happy, until Mosssting padded out of his den with a solemn look on his face. He padded over to Turtlestar and whispered something into his ear. The leader looked at him with sadness in his eyes, and scrabbled back up the side of the cleft onto the Highledge. He silenced the Clan with a flick of his tail.
"Mosssting has just given me some sad news; Flamelight has joined StarClan. She will be missed by all, and we will all mourn her death. She died a noble warrior's death," the leader meowed.
Hazelbelly let out a wail and raced out of the camp entrance and into the forest. Stripepaw looked at his paws, feeling like he should've been able to do something, but the orange she-cat had said that it was her time, and he had to respect that. He looked at Mosssting who just flicked his ear and padded back to his den. Stripepaw followed his mentor and padded into the den, relishing the warmth it gave as opposed to the cold and unprotected den of the WindClan medicine cats. He curled up in his nest, wanting to get a good rest, even though it was only just past dawn. He fell asleep nearly instantly and his dreams were filled with mice and shrews.

{I'm so sorry it took so long to update this! I had some writers block, and then school started back up but this book is back up and running, and I'll have a couple more chapters up very shortly! I hope you enjoyed this chapter!
warriorcats-mlp out!}

Chapter seven

[image]

As Stripepaw finished off his mouse, Mosssting padded over to him, the early moonlight of the full moon bathing his pelt. He flicked his tail along his apprentice's flank.
"Come on, you're coming to the Gathering as well," he meowed.
Stripepaw stood up as quickly as a lightning bolt and raced to the camp entrance where a patrol of cats was waiting. Turtlestar was counting everyone and nodded as the two medicine cats joined them.
"Alright, let's go," Turtlestar meowed. Stripepaw padded along excitedly, waiting to get to the Gathering. This was a big part of the apprentice's life, it was the very first time he would be introduced in front of the other Clans.
He padded at the back of the group, staying close to Mosssting. "Do you think Turtlestar will mention what happened with WindClan? Or will Stonestar say something?" he meowed.
"I'm not sure. I don't think Turtlestar would say anything, but I'm not sure about Stonestar," Mosssting replied. Stripepaw sighed and continued padding along.
Soon the ThunderClan patrol crossed over into WindClan territory. They stayed only a few tail-lengths away from the shore of the lake, and bristled their fur in the cold, even though it was nearly new-leaf. Suddenly, the patrol stopped and everyone looked up the slope of the moor. Stripepaw followed their gaze and saw a WindClan patrol making their way down to the ThunderClan cats. Stonestar dipped his head to Turtlestar as his patrol neared them.
"We will put our rivalry aside for tonight, and enjoy the truce of the full moon," Stonestar meowed. Turtlestar nodded and led his patrol on. When the two patrols came to the tree-bridge, Turtlestar dipped his head.
"Your Clan may cross first," he meowed politely.
"Thank you." Stonestar gave his fellow leader a curt nod and led his Clan across the bridge. Even though they were being polite, there was no disguising the hostility between the two Clans. Neck fur bristled and teeth were bared, but no one moved to attack.

Turtlestar flicked his tail and started to cross once WindClan was across. Stripepaw gulped when he saw the bridge; it was double his height, and was covered in icy frost, making it slippery and cold. Mosssting nudged him up and held onto his tail with his jaws for extra support. Stripepaw was halfway across when his front paw gave out from underneath him. He slipped across the ice and fell on his chin with a thud. He groaned as his jaw ached with pain, but he pushed himself up and padded on. When he reached the end, he leapt as far as he could to get as far away from the tree-bridge as he could, and followed his Clan into the clearing further inland.
He pushed through the reeds and padded into the large clearing, where the other Clans were all gathered. Plumstar, the leader of ShadowClan, was already perched on a branch on the large tree in the centre. Stonestar and Turtlestar were both padding over to join him. A ginger-and-tortoiseshell she-cat stood at the base as well, waiting for the two leaders. She was, no doubt, Dapplestar, the leader of RiverClan. Whiteshade had told Stripepaw about her when she became leader a few moons ago. The previous leader, Flowingstar, had died saving an apprentice in a fire that had broken out when lighting struck their camp. From what Whiteshade had told him, she sounded like a nice cat.
Stripepaw watched as the three leaders clambered up the tree onto branches of their own, and silenced the Clans with flicks of their tails.
"Let the Gathering begin!" Plumstar yowled. He was the oldest of the leaders, which was evident as grey fur stuck out in his black and brown pelt. Stripepaw sat down with Mosssting and the other medicine cats. A few other cats from other Clans surrounded him, and he shifted uncomfortably.
Plumstar stood up first to speak to the Clans.
"ShadowClan is doing well, and we have recovered well from the bought of greencough we had earlier in leaf-bare. Prey is starting to run more and more each day, and we will recover fully after the deaths of a few Clan-mates. But, we did lose our medicine cat, Leapwing, so her apprentice, Greypaw, will be taking over as medicine cat. Leapwing died protecting her Clan from sickness, and she will forever be honoured in our Clan." He sat back down and let Dapplestar take over.
"RiverClan is doing well and we have two new warriors; Fluffspot and Blackface."

Stripepaw looked ahead of him and saw two cats stand up. One was a small tortoiseshell she-cat and the other was a brown tom with a black patch on his face. Mosssting leaned over and whispered in Stripepaw's ear.
"That tortoiseshell is the apprentice that Flowingstar died saving," he whispered. Stripepaw nodded and watched as they sat down again. "Also, some of my warriors have reported seeing twolegs gliding along the frozen lake with sharp blades strapped to their feet. I think it would be best if everyone stayed away from there."
Dapplestar sat back down and let the next leader speak. Turtlestar nodded to Stonestar to let him speak.
"WindClan is fairing well. Ebonystar gave her last life to protect her Clan, and I am now leader. My deputy is Mothstorm, and I have complete faith in him. One of our warriors, Redheart, has moved to the nursery as she is expecting kits." He sat down again and Turtlestar finally stood up to address the Clans.
"ThunderClan is doing well. Prey is running and sickness is gone. But since our last Gathering, two of our warriors drowned in the lake; Whiteshade and Stormfeather."
Stripepaw felt a lump in his throat as his leader talked about his dead parents.
"And we lost another warrior, Flamelight, in battle. But, Mosssting has taken an apprentice, Stripepaw."
The Clans started to cheer for the new medicine cat apprentice, and Stripepaw shrank down to the ground in embarrassment.
"And we have three new warriors: Hazelbelly, Berryclaw and Branchheart." Only a few soft murmurs were heard for the warriors.
Turtlestar nodded to the other leaders. "The Gathering is over!" he yowled, and leapt off his branch. Stonestar nodded and jumped down after him, followed by Dapplestar and Plumstar, who lost his balance as he landed in the ground. He was only a little bit older than Turtlestar, but the ThunderClan leader was still a lot stronger compared to the black and brown tom.
Stripepaw said a last goodbye to his fellow medicine cats and followed Mosssting to the tree bridge. ShadowClan was just ahead of them, crossing the slippery log. Stripepaw padded forward to get ready to cross, and didn't notice the figure in front of him, and crashed into the cat. A light ginger tom whirled around to face Stripepaw, his one grey ear flicking with irritation. His brown eyes pierced into Stripepaw's and the medicine cat apprentice sank to the

ground with discomfort. His neck fur started to rise as the ShadowClan warrior bared his teeth.
"Watch it, mouse-brain!" he snarled. He turned back to face his Clan-mates, where he whispered into one of their ears, "Are all ThunderClan cats this stupid?"
Stripepaw shrank to the ground in a mixture of anger and fear. He gulped and stood up straight, licking his chest fur with embarrassment and looked away from the ShadowClan tom. The ginger warrior huffed and padded swiftly across the tree-bridge into the darkness of the night.
Turtlestar and Flamestripe jumped up and led the Clan across the bridge. Mosssting nudged Stripepaw up and again, held his tail in his teeth. This time, Stripepaw was much more careful where he placed his feet and padded across with ease. He followed the rest of his Clan as they all made their way back to their territory, and was very wary as he padded only tail-lengths away from the shore of the lake. Images of Stormfeather diving into the water after him flashed in his mind, then Whiteshade jumping in after her. More pictures of their sodden bodies entered his mind, so he squinted his eyes shut tightly to try and push them away. He felt a tail rest on his shoulder, and he opened his eyes slowly to look up at his mentor, who's eyes were filled with sympathy and understanding. The old, grey cat smiled at him and continued on.

As Stripepaw padded through the tunnel entrance, he could feel his paws dragging across the ground with exhaustion. He started to make his way to his den, but was interrupted by Rosekit and Leopardkit. They jumped around him excitedly and bumped against his shoulders.
"How was it? Was is exciting?" Leopardkit asked, still leaping around.
"Tell us all about it!" Rosekit meowed and looked up at Stripepaw with her big, blue eyes. He smiled at her and flicked her ear with his tail.
"It was great, and you'll get to go in a couple of moons," he meowed. He watched as her face lit up and she started to jump around more enthusiastically than ever. He smiled at the kits one last time before padding away to his den, hoping to get a good, long sleep.

{Ok, short chapter I know, but this chapter was solely for the Gathering. More long chapters to come!
warriorcats-mlp out!}

Chapter eight

[image]

A couple moons passed without trouble, and soon leaf-bare turned to new-leaf. The grass finally turned green again, and more prey started to come about. Mistpetal had moved to the nursery, now plump with Cedarfoot's kits. But she was still coughing and spluttering all the time, due to never getting over her whitecough. Stripepaw padded through the forest, hoping to find some catmint for the grey-and-white queen. He trotted calmly to the abandoned twoleg nest, where he knew it would've finally grown back fully. He managed to get there easily, and nipped as many stalks as he could, and fit it all in his jaws. The scent was enticing, but he knew that Mistpetal needed it desperately. As he was picking up the last bit of catmint, he heard a rustling sound behind him. He pricked his ears, and his tail started flicking warily from side to side. The last time he was there, a ShadowClan patrol had ambushed him and stolen his herbs. He breathed in the scents around him, but the strong smell of catmint masked everything else.
Gingerly, he placed his herbs down and padded over to the bushes surrounding him where he heard the rustling. Suddenly, a light grey shape flashed out of the hiding spot and pinned him to the ground.
"Rosepaw!" he growled, "You scared me! What are you doing out here?"
The grey apprentice blinked her beautiful blue eyes innocently.
"Me? Oh, nothing."
"Come on, what are you doing?" Stripepaw urged.
"Well..." Rosepaw shuffled her paw along the ground. "Leopardpaw bet that I couldn't stalk you without you noticing, so I did! And it worked!"
"Yeah, until you made a loud noise," Stripepaw huffed. "Now, would you mind getting off me?"
Rosepaw smiled cheekily and stepped off the medicine cat apprentice, letting him get to his paws. She looked at the pile of catmint then back at Stripepaw.
"Want some help carrying those?" she meowed, pointing with her tail to the herbs.

"Well...you may as well since you're here," Stripepaw meowed hesitantly. Rosepaw smiled and took half of the pile in her jaws, letting Stripepaw take the other half. They padded side-by-side all the way back to camp, where Rosepaw helped him put the herbs away.
"Do you have any more chores?" Rosepaw asked him.
"I don't think so," Stripepaw replied, trying to think of anything else he needed to do.
"Great! Follow me!" Rosepaw quickly turned and ran out of the den.
"Wha-" Stripepaw stood for a moment, confused, before sighing with defeat and running after her. They left the camp and raced down to the lake.
As Stripepaw stood at the shore, images began to flash in his mind of Stormfeather and Whiteshade. He was brought back to reality when Rosepaw cuffed his ears.
"Come on Stripepaw, it was what? Two, three moons ago?" she meowed softly.
"I know, but I just can't help but feel that it's my fault," he sighed. Rosepaw pushed her nose against his, and rubbed against him, purring.
"I understand," she purred. Stripepaw's eyes widened as he started to get a fluttery feeling in his chest, and he felt his fur turn hot. He looked down into Rosepaw's stunning blue eyes, the ones he had known so well ever since he was a kit, and suddenly felt his heart melting.
No! I'm a medicine cat! I can't have feelings for her!
He quickly pulled away and looked at his reflection in the still water. Rosepaw sat beside him, her grey fur brushing against his.
"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that," she meowed, flicking her tail across the grass.
"I-It's fine," Stripepaw stammered.
They sat there for a while, just looking into the water, and Stripepaw fluffed up his pelt as the wind started up, bringing scents of prey along with it. But two scents in particular stood out, and Stripepaw recognised them instantly; Browntail and Taylor.
For the past two moons, Stripepaw had seen Browntail leaving camp at night, even more than he used to. He stood up straight and took in the scent again, and was shocked when a new scent mingled in with theirs; blood. He heard a yowl in the distance, probably near the WindClan border, and instantly knew what was going on.

He jumped to his paws, knocking Rosepaw over slightly.
"Hey! What was that for?" she grumbled.
"Get Mosssting! Now!" he meowed hurriedly. "Take him to the WindClan border, that's where I'll be."
Rosepaw looked confused for a moment, but raced back to camp anyway.
Stripepaw hared across the grass until he came to what he feared. He saw Browntail standing protectively over Taylor, who's belly was very swollen, as she writhed in pain. He raced down to the two cats.
"She's kitting, isn't she?" he asked.
"Yes! Please help her!" Browntail shrieked.
"There's not much I can do, it's up to her, but I want you to go find a stick, I sturdy one that she can bite down on, and get a wet ball of moss for her to drink from," Stripepaw instructed calmly. Browntail nodded hastily and raced off to find the stick and moss. Stripepaw turned to face Taylor, who looked up at him with terror and pain in her eyes. He gently placed his paw on her belly and pushed down softly.
"Four kits," he told her. Taylor groaned in response, the bell on her collar jingling as she moved around.
Not too long later, Browntail returned with a wet ball of moss and a stick in his jaws. He gave them straight to Taylor, who graciously took them and started lapping up the dripping water.
Soon, Rosepaw returned with Mosssting and Turtlestar.
Oh no, Turtlestar's going to get so mad, Stripepaw thought. Having a mate from outside the Clan was forbidden, especially having a kittypet for a mate.
Mosssting raced over to stand beside Stripepaw, flicking his tail with annoyance.
"Who is she? Why am I here?" he asked with anger.
"Her names Taylor and she's my mate!" Browntail proclaimed.
Turtlestar, Mosssting and Rosepaw all collectively gasped and stared at the grey-and-brown warrior.
"The first one's coming!" Taylor gasped, breaking the silence.
Mosssting nudged Stripepaw forward.
"You help her, you need to learn how to," he meowed. Stripepaw nodded and looked into the kittypet's green eyes.
"Take a deep breath in, then let it out and push," Stripepaw told her, remaining calm. Taylor nodded and took in a deep breath, as

instructed. Soon, a wet bundled of fur slid out onto the grass beside her. Stripepaw nipped the translucent sack and started licking it the wrong way to warm it up. It had a dusty brown pelt with black dots.
"It's a tom," he meowed as he placed the kit at Taylor's belly. She smiled happily as she looked at her son, but her face soon twisted and contorted in pain again. Not too long later, another kit was born. It had a ginger-and-orange dappled pelt with a fluffy tail.
"A she-kit this time," Stripepaw meowed. The next one was another she-kit with a cream pelt and brown paws, tail tip and muzzle. Stripepaw gave the she-kit to Browntail to lick. The last kit was a dark grey and black tabby tom, which he gave to Rosepaw to lick. The grey apprentice recoiled.
"Um, what do you want me to do with that?" she asked, slightly disgusted.
"Lick him," Stripepaw meowed impatiently.
"That, *thing*, is half kittypet. I'm not touching it," she meowed rudely.
"I don't have time for this!" Stripepaw growled and pushed the kit in front of Rosepaw, and she hesitantly started to lick it.
Browntail leaned down to rasp his tongue over Taylor's ears.
"They're perfect," he whispered.
"Yes, and not allowed," Turtlestar added loudly. Browntail and Taylor looked up at him, bewildered. Turtlestar shook his head in regret, and Stripepaw instantly knew what he was about to say.
"I'm sorry Browntail, but you have compromised your loyalties and we can't have a warrior in ThunderClan who can't decide where he belongs," the leader meowed.
"But I-"
"No buts," Turtlestar interrupted Browntail. "You are never to return to the Clans, and your kits shall never step foot on ThunderClan territory."
Browntail's jaw dropped, and his eyes clouded over with regret.
"Stripepaw? We're kin, I'm your mother's brother, please, I love ThunderClan," he sobbed. Stripepaw looked away as Browntail mentioned Stormfeather. It was true, Browntail was the only kin he had left, but Browntail was a disloyal traitor.
"And where were you when she was drowning in the lake? Probably prancing about with this...kittypet!" Stripepaw spat with contempt and rage. "How dare you bring her into this! You disrespect her

name and the name of StarClan!"
Browntail jumped back with shock, and cowered in fear next to Taylor.
"I hope you're off our territory by tomorrow," Stripepaw added, before whipping around and stalking off. He heard paw steps behind him and turned around to see Rosepaw racing after him. He slowed down his pace enough for her to catch up.
"You were a bit harsh," she murmured. Stripepaw shrugged.
"He's a traitor, and he dishonoured my mother's name, I only gave him what he deserved," he stated simply. The two were silent for a while, until Rosepaw spoke up again.
"You know, that last tabby kit looked a bit like you," she commented.
"Whatever," Stripepaw grumbled.
"Well Browntail-"
"I don't care about that traitor!" Stripepaw yelled with aggression. Rosepaw jumped in fright and stopped walking. Stripepaw looked at her, feeling guilty for frightening her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you, I just don't want to hear about him anymore."
"Did you know about them? You seemed to know what was happening before you even saw anything," Rosepaw meowed.
"Yeah, I found them together about two moons ago, and he heard her tell him that she was having kits, but I didn't tell anyone because I didn't want to be a snitch," he sighed. "Sometimes I just don't know what to do." He flopped to the ground and placed his chin on his fore-paws, heaving out a big sigh. He felt Rosepaw's soft fur brush against his as she sat down beside him and buried her nose into his flank.
"I'll always be here to help you," she meowed. Stripepaw twisted his head around to face her and smiled gratefully. His brown eyes locked with her sky blue ones, and neither of them moved for what seemed like an eternity.

{Yay! This one was a longer chapter thank goodness, but there will be even longer chapters coming! Comment what you think about the StripexRose mush! They are personally one of my fave couples that I've ever written about. And also a question for all of you:
Q. If you were Turtlestar, would you have banished Browntail, or let him stay in the Clan? Also, what do you think of

Browntail? I'd love to hear what you guys think!
warriorcats-mlp out!}

Chapter nine

[image]

Stripepaw leaped onto Leopardpaw's back and pinned him to the ground. Leopardpaw twisted around and grabbed Stripepaw's scruff and threw him aside.
"Yeah! Go Stripepaw! Tear him apart!" Rosepaw called from the side of the training hollow. Leopardpaw stopped and looked up at his grey sister.
"Hey! I'm your brother! You should be cheering for me!" he cried, the fur on his neck standing on end. Rosepaw shot him a cheeky grin. Stripepaw took the opportunity to strike while his opponent was distracted, and dived at Leopardpaw's feet, knocking the red-brown and grey spotted apprentice over. Leopardpaw let out a squeak of surprise as he fell to the ground, and growled at the medicine cat apprentice.
Berryclaw let out a *mrrrow* of laughter as her apprentice was knocked to the ground. Mosssting padded forward and brushed his tail along Stripepaw's flank.
"Good job," the old medicine cat meowed. Stripepaw beamed with pride and puffed his chest out. Rosepaw bounded forward and pushed her nose against Stripepaw's muzzle.
"You were amazing," she whispered. Stripepaw smiled and flicked her ear with his tail.
"Alright, Rosepaw and Stripepaw now," Cedarfoot, Rosepaw's mentor, meowed. Rosepaw smirked cheekily at Stripepaw.
"Now you're going down," she growled softly with a hint of laughter.
"Not if you go down first," Stripepaw retorted. Rosepaw waggled her rump in the air for a moment, preparing to leap, and Stripepaw did the same, giving her a little smile. Rosepaw shot through the air in a grey flash and landed atop Stripepaw's back. He reared back on his hind legs to throw her off, and she hit the ground with a hard *thud*.
"Oh you'll pay for that!" she growled and leapt at him. They tussled for a bit, until Rosepaw had Stripepaw pinned to the ground. Her muscles had grown a lot more recently, and she had gotten stronger

than Stripepaw, who didn't do battle training very often at all. Rosepaw stared into Stripepaw's eyes, and discretely rasped her tongue across his face. He used to get very hot and embarrassed when she did that, but he had gotten used to it over the past half moon of secretly having a small relationship with her, and now relished the feelings of affection he got when he was with her.
"That was great, Rosepaw!" Cedarfoot praised his apprentice.
Rosepaw smiled and stepped off Stripepaw, giving him a strange sense of *deja vu* from when she stalked him at the abandoned twoleg nest half a moon ago, and when Browntail was banished. The whole Clan had been shocked to find out about his disloyalty, but they all agreed he needed to go.
"Alright, we need to get back and check on Mistpetal and her kits," Mosssting meowed, nudging Stripepaw to his paws. The medicine cat apprentice shook his pelt out to rid it of any dust and moss that had clung to his fur, and followed his mentor out of the training hollow.

Back at camp, Stripepaw sat beside Mistpetal as her body was wracked with another bout of coughing. He curled his tail around her three kits, hoping they wouldn't catch anymore of the sickness. He feared that Mistpetal's whitecough had developed into greencough, and one of the kits had possibly caught it. The she-kit that looked like her mother with her grey-and-white pelt started coughing as well, her tiny body shaking. Stripepaw looked at her solemnly, then picked her up by the scruff and placed her beside her mother's belly. The two other kits, a tom-kit and another she-kit, still sat against Stripepaw, keeping warm. All three of the kits had yet to be named, as when they were kitted, Mistpetal was too weak to choose names. Cedarfoot had decided to let her decide when she was ready.
"Have you thought of names yet?" he asked the queen. She looked up, her grey eyes glazed over with sickness.
"Leafkit for the red-brown she-kit, and Cedarkit for the grey-and-white she-kit," she rasped weakly. Stripepaw smiled at her.
"Those are great names, and Cedarfoot will be so honoured," he meowed, licking the unnamed tom.
"I can't decide on a name for the tom, I'm thinking Toadkit or Fluffykit," she meowed, looking at the red-brown and white tom-kit.
"I think Toadkit is nice," Stripepaw suggested. Mistpetal nodded and

dropped her head back onto her paws. Stripepaw placed Leafkit and Toadkit at their mother's belly and padded out of the nursery, leaving them to get some sleep.
As he padded out, he saw Rosepaw racing over to him.
"Stripepaw! I beat Leopardpaw! I was great!" she cried. When she made it over to him, she sat by him and he rasped his tongue across her cheek.
"That's great!" he meowed happily. Rosepaw's blue eyes sparkled with pride and she nuzzled her nose into Stripepaw's cheek.
"Come with me," he whispered, and led her out of camp. He padded through the forest with the light grey apprentice at his heels, and finally stopped when they came to a secluded part of the territory.
"I need to tell you something," Stripepaw meowed and he looked at Rosepaw with affection-filled eyes. She stepped forward and smiled.
"Yes?"
"I think...I'm in love with you," he finally meowed. Rosepaw stood still for a few heartbeats, not saying anything, until she finally spoke up.
"I love you too," she whispered and looked away, ashamed. "I'm so sorry! I know you're a medicine cat, but you're the sweetest, funniest, greatest and most amazing cat I've ever met, and I don't think I'd be able to stand not being with you!" she cried.
"Don't be sorry! It's not your fault I'm a medicine cat," he told her. "Maybe I can become a warrior apprentice, so I can be with you."
"Yes! That way we'll be forevermore," she meowed, placing her forehead on his so that their eyes were barely a mouse-tail apart.
"I love you," Stripepaw breathed, staring into the ocean of blue that were Rosepaw's eyes.
"And I'm going to teach you to hunt so you'll be the best warrior ever," Rosepaw meowed, pulling away.
"Second best warrior," Stripepaw corrected, smiling at Rosepaw. She smirked at him and flicked her tail across his flank.
"Thanks, but my brother will probably be so much better than me," she sighed. "Berryclaw loves him as her apprentice, he'll be a warrior in no time!"
Stripepaw laughed and bounded away into the thick undergrowth. "Come on!" he called over his shoulder. When the grey apprentice finally caught up, she was out of breath.
"You're a fast runner for a medicine cat," she panted.
"No muscle mass," Stripepaw meowed simply, shrugging. Rosepaw

laughed and licked his ear.
"We can fix that," she purred. "You'll be a strong warrior, even stronger than my brother. I mean, you did beat him in combat today."
"True. You'd better watch out!" he meowed mischievously. Rosepaw cuffed his ear with her soft paw and sat down.
"Maybe you should ask Mosssting and Turtlestar first before you start training," she meowed. Stripepaw nodded.
"Good point. Come on, let's go," he said, waving his tail for her to follow him. Rosepaw nodded and followed him back to the camp.
"Stay here," he meowed as they entered the camp. Rosepaw rolled her eyes.
"Okay, am I allowed to move?" she asked sarcastically.
"No, sit right in the entrance," Stripepaw replied, flicking his tail. "I don't want them to know why I'm changing my future like this."
Rosepaw nodded and sat down, starting to draw lines in the dirt with her claws. Stripepaw smiled at her one last time, and padded towards the medicine den, hoping that Mosssting would take the news well. When he entered, he saw that his mentor was busily sorting through herbs in quite a rush, probably frantically looking for something.
"Mosssting, I need to talk with you," Stripepaw began slowly.
"Yes?" Mosssting asked distractedly. Stripepaw shuffled his paws on the ground with slight guilt.
"Well, I've been thinking...I love being a medicine cat but I feel like my destiny is somewhere else," he meowed, still looking down at his paws.
"That's nice," Mosssting replied, still shuffling through the herbs.
Stripepaw looked up at his mentor, who still hadn't looked at him.
"I want to be a warrior!" Stripepaw blurted out. To his surprise, Mosssting didn't pull his attention away from his task. The old medicine cat let out a big sigh of relief as he found what he was looking for and picked up a small pile of catmint in his jaws.
"Get this to Mistpetal and her sick kit, I need to go find some honey," he meowed as he dropped the catmint at his apprentice's paws.
"But you didn't-" Stripepaw began but stopped as Mosssting raced out of the den. Stripepaw sighed, rolling his eyes, and padded out of the den and over to the nursery. As he entered, he was surprised by a large bout of coughing from Cedarkit and Mistpetal. He quickly

dropped the herbs at their paws and urged them to eat it. Mistpetal only just managed to lap them up, but the the tiny grey-and-white kit was too weak and could barely lift her tiny head. Her eyes were still shut, like her litter-mates, but she still squinted them. She opened her mouth to meow but all that came out was a very soft, tiny squeak. Stripepaw's heart melted as he wished that the little kit would eat the catmint.
"Can you manage to feed the catmint to her?" he asked Mistpetal. The frail queen nodded slightly and bent down to assist her sickly kit.
Stripepaw sighed with exhaustion and padded out of the nursery. He looked longingly at the leaders den in the cliff face, but he knew he needed to speak with his mentor first. *Come on Mosssting! Where are you?* he thought desperately. He swivelled around to look at Rosepaw, who was fidgeting impatiently at the camp exit. A flash of grey signalled that Mosssting had returned and Stripepaw watched as the old cat raced into the nursery with a large leaf in his mouth with a sticky, golden liquid dripping from it.
Oh come on! Why does he have to be so busy right now?
He sat, waiting for Mosssting, for a while, until he finally gave up and made his way to the leaders den. He scrabbled up the slanting cliff face, placing his paws in the paw-holds, and pulled himself up onto the ledge. He stood outside Turtlestar's den, his heart racing, as he thought about what he was about to do. *I'm choosing the right destiny, I know it.*
But part of Stripepaw knew that this wasn't his destiny, but he ignored the feeling and cleared his throat loudly.
"It's Stripepaw, Turtlestar," he meowed into the darkness.
"Come in," came a rasping voice. Stripepaw took in a deep breath, composing himself, and padded in. *This is it, no going back.*
He stared at Turtlestar's glowing amber eyes, which shone prominently in the darkness, and gulped. His heart skipped a beat, and another one, and he felt his legs start to go weak. The next words he spoke would change his entire future, but he was willing to give up his medicine position for Rosepaw.
"Turtlestar, I need to tell you something very important. I-"
"Turtlestar!" Flamestripe, the ThunderClan deputy, burst into the den, panting. "It's Mistpetal's kit, she...dead," she panted, shaking her head with sadness. Turtlestar's eyes filled with sadness, and he stood up from his nest and padded over to his deputy.

"We'll sit vigil tonight, and mourn the loss of such a precious and fragile life," the leader meowed, placing his tail on Flamestripe's shoulder.
"But I think that Mistpetal might join her by moonhigh," Flamestripe told him with regret.
"Well let's hope that Mosssting and Stripepaw can save her," Turtlestar replied, looking at Stripepaw. The medicine cat apprentice suddenly felt far more guilty. He was about to leave this life, and Mosssting was old, and mightn't survive much longer.
Flamestripe nodded and raced out of the den.
"Now, Stripepaw, you were saying?" Turtlestar looked expectantly at him.
"I-uh...well," he stuttered, not sure what to say anymore. He closed his eyes and breathed slowly, contemplating what to say. Rosepaw or medicine? Suddenly, a vision of glowing blue eyes appeared, and they started to cloud over with death. It was a sign! If Stripepaw chose medicine, Rosepaw would die! If he became a warrior with her, he could help her by always fighting by her side. He nodded with assurance and looked determinedly at Turtlestar.
"I want to be-"
"Foxes!"
Stripepaw and Turtlestar both snapped their attention to the den entrance, and they raced out of the den and looked out over the side of the ledge. The whole camp was in panic and cats were racing all over the place. Five foxes chased warriors around the camp, while other warriors attempted to fight them off.
Then, one sound that Stripepaw could discern from the others too easily, split the air. Stripepaw turned his attention to the entrance tunnel just in time to see Rosepaw dragged away by a fox at the tail. Her cry broke Stripepaw's heart instantly.
"Stripepaw! Help!"

Chapter ten

[image]

Stripepaw felt as if his paws were stuck to the ledge, he didn't move one bit. His eyes widened and he felt like his heart had just dropped to the bottom of a pit. His breathing became ragged and he nearly fainted.
He shook his head and leapt off the ledge and raced after Rosepaw, desperate to save her.
"Rosepaw!" he called out. "Rosepaw answer me!" His voice became more desperate and his blood turned cold. *Please StarClan! Help me find her! Save her!*
He heard a wail in the distance, and he instantly shot towards it. He could hear more paw-steps behind him, but he didn't dare look back. He hoped that it was more warriors, but he couldn't be sure. All of his senses were blocked with terror, and suddenly the image of Rosepaw's eyes glazing over came to him again. He pushed the thought away and pushed himself to run faster, tears streaming down his face.
"Rosepaw!" he cried again. Her reply call was much closer this time, and much more blood curdling.
"Help me! I can't take it anymore!"
Stripepaw's lungs screamed for air, but he pushed on, determined to find her. He finally let his instincts take over, and Rosepaw's scent, mixed with fox and blood, washed over him. He was so close, he knew it. He took a sharp turn and entered a small clearing known as Prey Clearing. There, in the centre, was a fox hovering menacingly over a beat and bloodied Rosepaw. Her once beautiful, soft grey fur was now matted and clumped with scarlet blood, her ears were shredded and one eye was shut tightly with a large scratch over it. Stripepaw gasped at the sight, and his body started to fill with adrenaline. In a surge of courage, he threw himself at the fox, only to be batted away like a mouse. He shook his head to clear it and, without hesitation, leapt at the fox again. This time, he aimed directly for the throat, and dug his claws in. The fox raked its claws across the apprentice's face in retaliation, catching Stripepaw's nose. Blood started to pool to the ground, but Stripepaw

didn't feel any pain; he felt nothing. He dived under the fox's belly and raked his claws across it, letting blood spill out. The fox yelped, and kicked Stripepaw with one of its hind legs. It hit Stripepaw squarely in the shoulder and this time a searing pain shot through him. But that only gave him more energy.
Stripepaw squirmed out from under the fox and grasped its tail with his teeth. It tried to throw him off, but he clung on. Suddenly, more cats burst through the bushes and stood, bristling, in the clearing. There were Sandwhisker, Birchsong, Berryclaw and Leopardpaw. They all readied themselves to leap at the fox. The red-brown creature growled at them and finally swatted Stripepaw away. He was thrown across the clearing and crashed into a tree. He groaned as his vision started to blur and black spots appeared. He saw a bright light coming towards him, and he nearly gave in, but a desperate cry from Rosepaw called him back. He snapped his eyes open and stared at his love. He pushed himself up and trudged over to her as fast as he could, wincing as his back ached and stung with every move he made.
He sat down beside Rosepaw and rasped his tongue across her cheek.
"It's okay, I'm here now," he meowed, trying to comfort her.
"I'm sorry, Stripepaw. But I know you'll be a great medicine cat, I wish I could see you fulfilling your true destiny," she whimpered softly.
"No, no, no, no, no! Stay with me!" Stripepaw sobbed into her fur. "Please! You said we'd be forevermore!"
"I'm sorry," she croaked, closing her eyes. Stripepaw stared at her and shuddered. Tears started to stream from his eyes, and he felt his world crashing down around him.
"Rosepaw?" he meowed softly. The rise and fall of her chest became slower and slower, and it eventually stopped. He pressed his ear to her chest, but there was no heartbeat to listen for. "Rosepaw! No!"

Stripepaw's breathing slowed, and he looked up, watching the battle his Clan-mates had thrown themselves into. He couldn't hear anything, just a high pitched noise. He could feel all emotion drip away from him as he held Rosepaw's body between his paws. A very faint cry echoed in his ears, and he saw Birchsong drop to the ground with blood pooling from his throat. Berryclaw stood over him, crying for her friend, as Sandwhisker and Leopardpaw battled

the fox until it ran away. Leopardpaw jumped about with pride and excitement, and Stripepaw's stomach flipped as he watched Leopardpaw turn around to see Rosepaw. His face fell instantly and a loud wail escaped his mouth. He raced over to his sister and pushed Stripepaw away furiously and sobbed into her crusted grey fur.

"StarClan no! Why didn't you take me instead? Please Rosepaw!" Leopardpaw cried out to the sky, sobbing uncontrollably.

Stripepaw stared around numbly. His face was damp and his eyes were starting to dry up after crying for so long. He watched as Berryclaw grabbed Leopardpaw's scruff and dragged him away so that Sandwhisker could pick up Rosepaw to take back to camp. In a moment of sorrow, Stripepaw raced over to Sandwhisker and took Rosepaw's scruff in his jaws. He rested her head on his back, while Sandwhisker carried her bottom half on his back. Stripepaw whimpered one last time, letting one more tear fall to the ground, and trudged toward camp with Rosepaw supported on his back. *If only I hadn't hesitated so long when I saw her dragged off, I might've been able to save her.*

Ahead of him, Berryclaw dragged Birchsong with the help of a still distraught Leopardpaw, who was now also mourning for his father. When they made it back to camp, the five foxes had left and cats were lining up outside Mosssting's den to be tended to. Three cats already lay on the ground, dead. Stripepaw sighed when he saw the bodies of Gingerclaw, Willownose and Cedarkit. Although Cedarkit had already died before the battle, Stripepaw still wished she could've lived. He watched as Berryclaw laid Birchsong down on the ground next to Willownose, the only elder they had, and as Leopardpaw sobbed into his father's black and white fur. Stripepaw started to sob once again as he let Rosepaw's body slip off his back next to her father, Birchsong. His gut twisted as Moonpoppy padded out of the medicine den and looked at her mate and daughter in the throng of dead cats. She closed her eyes and wailed up to the sky, before racing over to them and sobbing while comforting her son. Cedarfoot sat beside his daughter, sobbing as his mate, Mistpetal, tried to comfort him while also keeping conscious.

Stripepaw painfully looked at Rosepaw one last time, before padding away to the medicine den. Inside, he saw Mosssting tending to the wounds of Buzzardwish. He was frantically chewing up burdock root while also trying to get the cobwebs on the

wounds. Stripepaw felt a large throb of guilt, knowing that he nearly left Mosssting to do this all by himself.
He quickly padded over to his mentor and placed his paw on Mosssting's shoulder.
"Sorry I didn't come earlier, but I'm here to help now," he meowed.
Mosssting smiled and spat his burdock root pulp onto his paw, then started to rub it into the large scratch on Buzzardwish's shoulder.
"It's okay, you can put the cobwebs on," he told his apprentice.
Stripepaw nodded and gathered as much cobweb as possible, then placed them over the gash on the white tom's shoulder. He repeated the process for every cat that came in, and when they were done, he realised something horrible.
"ThunderClan is so small now, we've lost so many cats, and we have no expecting queens," he commented.
"Haven't you heard?" Mosssting meowed, looking at his apprentice.
"Doebrook moved to the nursery a few days ago, but she's already one moon along, she put it off so she could continue doing her duties."
"No, I didn't know. I guess nobody told me," Stripepaw meowed, puzzled.
"Well I told you but you didn't notice because you were so infatuated with Rosepaw."
Stripepaw snapped around and stared at his old mentor. How did he find out? Was it that obvious?
"I was not- I would never- I don't...I don't have her anymore, she's gone!" he cried. Mosssting sighed and embraced Stripepaw, comforting him. Stripepaw sobbed into his mentor's fur, wishing it was Rosepaw.
"I know what it's like to love another, trust me," Mosssting meowed.
"But you're a medicine cat, it just simply wasn't meant to be."
Stripepaw let out one more sob and looked up at his mentor. "But she was just so...perfect. I'm going to miss her so much," he meowed softly.
"Maybe you'll see her when we go to the Moonpool," Mosssting suggested.
"But I'll have to wait another half-moon to see her then, I can't wait that long!" Stripepaw exclaimed. "I'm sorry, but I can't do anything about it," Mosssting meowed regretfully and shrugged. "But, it's been a long day, and we'll be sitting vigil tonight, you should get some sleep until then."

Stripepaw nodded and padded over to his nest, his vision starting to blur with more tears. He curled up in his soft nest and closed his eyes, wishing sleep would come instantly.

Stripepaw was woken up by Mosssting's paw shaking his flank. Stripepaw groggily looked up at his mentor and yawned.
"Come on, the Clan is sitting vigil," Mosssting meowed, turning around to leave the den. He suddenly stopped ad turned around to look at Stripepaw again. "And Mistpetal is with them. We lost her a little after you fell asleep."
Stripepaw gasped as a pang of guilt hit him. He could've saved her if he wasn't so wrapped up in talking to Turtlestar about changing his mentor. He quickly stood up and shook his pelt, before following his mentor out of the den. The rest of the Clan was gathered around the pile of cats, most of them sobbing. Stripepaw padded up to them and sat beside Leopardpaw in front of Rosepaw's body. Stripepaw leaned down and buried his nose in her soft fur, but her body was now cold and rigid.
I just can't believe she's gone, he thought to himself. He remained calm, but he wanted to just wail like a kit for her.
That night, the Clan sat vigil for six cats: Mistpetal and Cedarkit, who both died of greencough, Willownose, who died protecting the nursery during the battle, Gingerclaw, who sacrificed herself to save Branchheart, Birchsong, who died protecting his two kits Rosepaw and Leopardpaw, and Rosepaw, who was taken by a fox.

Stripepaw could feel his eyes starting to droop as the sun started to rise. Mosssting placed his tail on his apprentice's shoulder.
"Get some sleep, you've been up all night," he meowed. Stripepaw nodded and, dragging his paws, padded over to his den. As soon as he had curled up in his nest, he fell asleep.

Chapter eleven

[image]

Stripepaw stood beside Mosssting as the medicine cats grouped around the Moonpool. Stripepaw had waited for this moment for half a moon, waiting to see Rosepaw again. He leaned down to lap up the water, but Rainsplash, the RiverClan medicine cat, cleared her throat to stop the cats from drinking.
"There's something I think we need to do, and I know that Greypaw has waited three moons for this to happen since Leapwing died," she meowed. Greypaw gasped, a smile spreading across her face.
"I'd like to give Greypaw her full name, if StarClan allows it," Rainsplash continued. The other medicine cats all nodded, agreeing that she should.
"Greypaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?" Rainsplash asked. Greypaw nodded.
"I do!" she meowed firmly.
"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Greypaw, from this moment you will be known as Greywing in honour of Leapwing. StarClan honours your patience and diligence." Rainsplash padded forward and placed her nose on Greywing's forehead, and the ShadowClan medicine cat licked her shoulder in turn.
"Greywing! Greywing!" Stripepaw called out, smiling at his friend. The other medicine cats all cheered, including Mouse-ear, who had gotten his full name two moons ago.
Stripepaw leaned down and lapped a few drops of water from the sparkling pool and lay down on the cold ground, hoping to see Rosepaw when he awoke in StarClan.

When Stripepaw opened his eyes, he was standing in a starlit clearing surrounded by holly and bramble bushes. Looking around, he noticed that there wasn't a single cat to be seen. His heart fell as he tried to pick up a scent of anyone, but nothing came to him. He looked around for a while, and then suddenly noticed, on the far

end of the clearing, a pair of eyes staring at him from the bushes. *I'd know those blue diamond-like eyes anywhere*. He raced over to the bushes as fast as his legs could carry him, and leapt into the bushes. Brambles and thorns tugged at his pelt, and he winced in pain, but pushed on. The blue eyes disappeared into the bushes, and more and more bramble tendrils started to block his way.
"Rosepaw!" he cried out, trying to get through. "Please Rosepaw!"
"I'm sorry Stripepaw," her voice echoed among the bushes, filling Stripepaw's ears with her soft voice.
"Come back!"
Stripepaw woke up with a jolt in a cold sweat. He was still beside the Moonpool, and everyone else was still asleep. He gulped and stood up, shaking each stiff leg in turn. He was tempted to try to fall back asleep to find his love, but he knew she wouldn't come to him.
He lay down again, trying to fall asleep, to wait for the others. But soon, Mouse-ear stirred beside him and yawned. Stripepaw looked up at him and sighed.
"Everything will be okay," Mouse-ear meowed kindly, smiling at Stripepaw. The ThunderClan apprentice sighed again and looked back down at his paws.
Soon, the others woke up and started padding out of the cavern. Stripepaw followed Mosssting closely, not talking to anyone, and didn't say goodbye when they separated at the border. As the two ThunderClan cats padded through their territory on the way back to the camp, Mosssting looked worriedly at Stripepaw.
"You didn't see her, did you?" he guessed.
"Sort of," Stripepaw mumbled, looking down at the ground.
Mosssting sighed with defeat and they walked in silence for the rest of the way.

The next day, Mosssting didn't wake Stripepaw up until sunhigh, letting him sleep in. Stripepaw looked up at his mentor when he woke up and grumbled, getting out of his nest. He padded out of the den and was surprised when he heard a soft cry of pain from the warrior's den. Mosssting had left camp to find herbs, so Stripepaw went to investigate by himself.
When he padded into the den, a horrible stench hit his nose. He recoiled and took a few steps back, only breathing through his mouth.

"What's going on?" he asked Sandwhisker, who was standing beside Cedarfoot, who was writhing in pain with his paw over his eye.
"It's his eye! The one that got scratched by a fox! I think it's infected," Sandwhisker told him with panic laced in his voice.
"It hurts so much!" Cedarfoot cried.
"But I put a poultice on it after the battle! I remember doing it," Stripepaw meowed, confused.
"It still got infected!" Cedarfoot sobbed in pain.
"But that battle was half a moon ago, why is it only now that it's getting infected?" Stripepaw asked, tilting his head to the side.
"Does it matter? Help him!" Sandwhisker growled. Stripepaw jolted back with fright at the warrior's tone and raced out of the den and into the medicine den.
"Infection, infection," Stripepaw meowed, closing his eyes and tried to think of the herb to treat infections. "Chervil!" Stripepaw remembered, and started to search for the herb. While he was going through the stash, he found a yellow flower called celandine, then he remembered it was used for damaged eyes. "Perfect!" He grabbed both of the herbs and raced back to the warrior's den. He gave the celandine to Sandwhisker to chew up, and he started to chew the chervil. When he was done, he trickled the juice of the chervil onto his paws, then told Cedarfoot to open his infected eye.
"I can't! It hurts too much!" the red-brown tom cried.
"It'll hurt more if you don't," Stripepaw told him. Cedarfoot sighed and reluctantly opened his infected eye. Stripepaw had to stop himself from gagging as he saw it. His eye was nearly split open, and blood and pus was oozing out of it and was crusted around the eye. Stripepaw gulped and trickled the chervil juice from his paw into Cedarfoot's eye. The warrior yelped in pain, but kept his eye open.
"Okay, put the celandine in my paw," Stripepaw meowed turning to Sandwhisker. The sandy tom nodded and spat the chewed up yellow herb into the medicine cat apprentice's paw. Stripepaw turned back to Cedarfoot and trickled the second herb into his infected green eye. Cedarfoot managed to keep his wail in, but he started to breath heavily.
"Now you need to rest, I'll get you some poppy seeds," Stripepaw meowed and raced back to the medicine den. He quickly found the poppy seeds and dabbed them with his paw to pick them up, then raced back to Cedarfoot. "Here, eat these," Stripepaw told him and

held out his paw. Cedarfoot nodded and lapped up the seeds and swallowed them. "Now try and get some sleep, I'll put some more ointment on it later."
Stripepaw sighed again and padded out of the den. When he looked up, he saw Mosssting entering the medicine den with some herbs in his mouth. Stripepaw quickly bolted after him.
"Mosssting! Cedarfoot has an infected eye! I put some chervil and celandine on it and gave him some poppy seeds, is that good?" Stripepaw meowed quickly. Mosssting looked at him, slightly confused for a moment and blinked.
"Uh, yes. You did very well, I'll go check on him," his mentor replied. Stripepaw smiled with pride. *I've learnt so much!* He puffed his chest out and suddenly, he could feel a warmth brushing beside him, and a sweet scent filled his nose. He turned to his side and saw the very faint shape of a cat, their glowing blue eyes were starlit and more of the shiny orbs were laced in their fur.
"Rosepaw?" Stripepaw meowed in disbelief. The figure nodded and closed their eyes, then disappeared. Stripepaw smiled as he recognised her scent in the air.
"Goodbye, Rosepaw."

{Ok yes, that was a short chapter, it was just a filler one. But the next one is important so stay tuned for it!
Warriorcats-mlp out!}

Chapter twelve

[image]

"Sparrowkit and Speckkit, get back here now!" Doebrook called across the camp from the nursery. Stripepaw smiled as he saw the two little kits scampering around. Sandwhisker stood next to the warrior's den with a proud gleam in his eyes as he watched his daughters playing.
"Stripepaw! Help us! Toadkit and Leafkit are after us!" the little brown tabby, Sparrowkit, cried gleefully.
"Come on over here," Stripepaw beckoned them with his tail. The two kits ran over to him and stood behind him.
"They'll never find us here!" the light brown speckled one, Speckkit, mewed. Stripepaw looked over at the nursery and saw Toadkit and Leafkit bounding out, their little tails sticking up in the air. They both started to sniff the air, trying to pick up their friends' scents. Leafkit looked up and spotted Stripepaw, and quickly bounded over to him with her brother behind her.
"Have you seen Sparrowkit and Speckkit?" she asked, her big green eyes stretched wide open innocently. Stripepaw opened his mouth to reply but was interrupted by giggling from behind him.
"Aha!" Toadkit cried and raced behind Stripepaw. "Found you!" he meowed as he pounced on Speckkit.
"Hey!" the she-kit cried. Sparrowkit giggled and jumped into the tussle.
"Toadkit! You should know better, you're nearly an apprentice," Stripepaw scolded the red-brown and white tom-kit.
"I know! Only two moons left until we become apprentices!" he meowed happily and looked at his sister, Leafkit.
"Will our father be better by then?" Leafkit asked. Stripepaw's smile fell. Cedarfoot had retired to the elder's den a few moons back because his infection couldn't be treated, and his right eye was permanently blind. He had even started to lose vision in his left one too.
"Listen, kits, I'm not sure your father will..." Stripepaw trailed off and looked at the elder's den. He was worried for Cedarfoot, but he knew he wouldn't last much longer. "He'll definitely be at your

ceremony, I can promise you," he finally meowed. The two kits exchanged excited glances, then raced back to the nursery with Sparrowkit and Speckkit following them. Stripepaw sighed; he knew how hard it was to lose the cats that raised you, but they didn't even know their mother, who died not long after they were born.
"Stripepaw!"
Stripepaw jumped with fright and whipped around to see Mosssting standing there.
"Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. I was just wondering, what did you say to them?" Mosssting asked.
"Well, I told them Cedarfoot would be at their apprentice ceremony," Stripepaw replied guiltily.
"You can't make promises like that. You know very well that Cedarfoot won't be with us for much longer," Mosssting meowed with concern.
"Sorry," Stripepaw mumbled. "But they're just kits! I couldn't tell them that!"
Mosssting shook his head. "Are you ready to go to the Moonpool soon?" he asked. Stripepaw nodded.
"Yes, I am."
Mosssting gave him a curt nod and walked off. Stripepaw sighed and looked up at the sky, which had turning a brilliant pink and purple as the sun set. The first few stars of Silverpelt shone in the sky, and instantly Stripepaw thought of Rosepaw. Her death had been nearly four moons ago, yet he still couldn't get over it. He had tried to speak with her every time he went to the Moonpool, but she never showed up. *Tonight will be the night I see you, I can feel it.*
The journey to the Moonpool was tiring, and wasn't particularly short, so he knew he had to get the traveling herbs ready. He padded over to the medicine den and went in, bathing in the scent of herbs. Mosssting was in there, gathering all of the herbs they would need to take.
"Here you are, eat up," the old cat meowed as he pushed a leaf with herbs on it towards Stripepaw. The apprentice rolled his eyes and lapped them up, cringing at their bitter taste.
"Okay, let's go," Stripepaw meowed once he had finished, and the two of them padded out of the den and into the forest.

"Greetings Mouse-ear," Mosssting meowed and gave a curt nod to the WindClan medicine cat. "How are you fairing without

Birchpoppy?"
One moon before when it was still Green-leaf, Birchpoppy died after having a bad reaction to being poisoned by wasp, and Mouse-ear was left to be the medicine cat. Greywing had easily adapted to being the medicine cat for ShadowClan by herself, but Rainsplash still hadn't gotten an apprentice.
"I'm doing well, and we have a new deputy; Dotpelt," Mouse-ear replied. Behind the three cats, there was a crunching sound as Greywing padded forward, stepping on the fallen red leaves.
"Hello everyone," she meowed and smiled at Stripepaw. The ThunderClan apprentice smiled back and flicked his ear in greeting.
The four cats waited a little longer, then Rainsplash finally turned up.
"That's everyone, let's go," Mosssting meowed and flicked his tail for the others to follow. They all padded behind him, and the younger cats all grouped together like normal, talking amongst themselves.
"This Leaf-fall has been colder than normal," Mouse-ear commented.
"Well you'd know because you're so exposed to the elements!" Greywing snorted.
"Well WindClan likes it, and you'd never find us anywhere near a horrid pine forest," Mouse-ear retorted.
"At least the leaves look beautiful!" Stripepaw intervened, straying from the their petty argument. They both nodded.
"You know, you should be a full medicine cat by now," Greywing meowed to Stripepaw, flicking her fluffy tail on his flank.
"Yeah, I know, but I don't think Mosssting thinks I'm ready," Stripepaw meowed solemnly.
"Oh please! You're already a great medicine cat! He'd have to be blind *and* deaf not to know that!" Mouse-ear reassured him, flicking his grey ears.
"Thanks," Stripepaw meowed gratefully. They continued with their small talk all the way to the Moonpool. As they walked through the entrance, Stripepaw placed his paws in the little paw-prints from past medicine cats, and he felt so much closer to them.
The five cats all sat around the glistening pool as the starlight shone on it. Mosssting stood up and looked at them all with a proud gleam in his eyes.
"I have decided it is time I finally give Stripepaw his full medicine cat name," he meowed loudly. Stripepaw gasped with delight and could hardly contain his excitement. "I, Mosssting, medicine cat of

ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help he will serve his Clan for many moons." Mosssting looked from the stars to Stripepaw and smiled. "Stripepaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?" he asked.
Stripepaw's breathing sped up with excitement. "I do!" he meowed firmly.
"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your true medicine cat name. Stripepaw, you have been through so much heartache, but you blazed through it like a true medicine cat. So I name you Stripeblaze. StarClan honours your kindness and courage, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ThunderClan!" Mosssting finished, and placed his nose on Stripeblaze's head. The new medicine cat licked his mentor's shoulder with respect and looked at him affectionately.
"Thank you, you've been like a father to me," Stripeblaze told him. Mosssting smiled and dipped his head.
"Stripeblaze! Stripeblaze! Stripeblaze!" the other medicine cats called his new name to the stars.
"Go on, take your first drink from the Moonpool as a full medicine cat," Mosssting meowed, nudging Stripeblaze. The grey tabby smiled and looked up at the stars, sending a silent prayer of thanks, and lapped up a few drops of water. He hunched down and lay down comfortably with his chin on his paws, and fell asleep.

"Open your eyes," a voice instructed. Stripeblaze snapped his eyes open and looked up. A light grey tabby tom with glistening blue eyes stood in front of him. "I'm Jayfeather, a past medicine cat of ThunderClan, and I am here to personally welcome you to the medicine cat group," the tabby meowed. Behind him were many more cats of all shapes and sizes. They all had the herby scent that Stripeblaze loved. A brown speckled she-cat stepped forward and touched her nose to Stripeblaze's head.
"I am Cherryflower, the medicine cat before Mosssting. He was a great apprentice, and he trained you well. I know you'll do your Clan proud," she meowed with a sweet voice and warm green eyes.
Then, the giant crowd of medicine cats parted into two sections, leaving one long pathway in the middle of them, and, running

down that pathway, were all of the cats that Stripeblaze had cared for and loved in his life. First came Mistpetal with Cedarkit beside her, then Willownose, Birchsong, Gingerclaw, Stormfeather, Whiteshade, Fernkit and Mousekit. Tears welled up in Stripeblaze's eyes as they all embraced him, lathering him in affectionate licks.
"Oh son, we're so proud of you!" Stormfeather cried. Whiteshade nodded.
"We've been watching you for so long now," he told his son.
Stripeblaze couldn't say anything, just sobbed.
"We wish we could've known you!" Fernkit mewed.
"It's hard being a kit forever," Mousekit added. Stripeblaze smiled at them and leaned down so he could look into their blue eyes that never changed colour.
"And here comes Rosepaw!" Birchsong chimed. Stripeblaze looked up hopefully and sobbed as he saw Rosepaw bounding up the pathway towards him, the stars gleaming in her eyes and a trail of stars streaming behind her.
"Stripeblaze!" she cried as she bowled into him, knocking him to the ground.
"Even after death, you're still stronger than me," he joked. Rosepaw looked at him lovingly and rasped her soft tongue across his cheek.
"Well you were always the funny one," she mewed. Stripeblaze gazed into her eyes, then suddenly felt a pang of sadness and hurt.
"Why did you never visit me when I came here every moon?" he asked her.
"Because I couldn't distract you from your true destiny. That's the reason I died. StarClan brought the foxes to the forest. I was never your destiny, I'm not on the path you're meant to take, and I never will be. You needed to be a medicine cat, and that couldn't happen with me there. I strayed from my own destiny as well, I will forever pay for it, but you must remain true to your heart." Tears glistened in her eyes, and the clear, starry liquid dropped to the ground. Stripeblaze's heart longed to be with her, but he knew she was right.
"Thank you," he whispered. They placed their foreheads on each other's and Stripeblaze watched as her ghostly figure faded into the stars, along with everyone else's. He closed his eyes and when he opened them again, he was beside the Moonpool. Everyone around him was awake and staring at him expectantly.
"How was it?" Greywing meowed eagerly with curiosity in her eyes.

"Sorry, I can't tell you," Stripeblaze replied with a mischievous glint in his eyes. Mosssting padded forward and placed his tail on Stripeblaze's shoulder.
"I can finally retire to the elder's den," he rasped. The medicine cats all shared laughs as they made their way back to their camps.
For the first time in four moons, Stripeblaze smiled a true, happy smile, and he rested his tail on his mentor's back as they walked home from the Moonpool for the last time as mentor and apprentice.

Epilogue

[image]

Stripeblaze happily picked at the marigold he was gathering. It had been many moons since his naming ceremony, and much had happened. Leafkit and Toadkit grew up to be Leafeyes and Toadfluff, in honour of the second name Mistpetal had in mind for him, and Speckkit, who grew up to be Speckpetal, was expecting his kits. Her sister Sparrowkit had become Sparroweye, and Hazelbelly and Buzzardwish had had two sons: Roughpaw and Snowpaw. Leopardpaw earned his warrior name and became Leopardpelt. He had an obvious crush on Leafeyes. Cedarfoot had died of blood poisoning not long after Stripeblaze got his full name, and Doebrook, Sandwhisker and Moonpoppy all died from a nasty bout of greencough, leaving Leopardpelt, Speckpetal and Sparroweye all orphaned.
A new apprentice from ShadowClan had joined ThunderClan after being threatened by her Clan-mates, and Stripeblaze had grown to quite like her. She was very sweet and helpful, though a bit mischievous. He was out picking herbs with her, and he noticed her padded back towards him.
"I found some marigold, and a bit of water mint!" the blue-grey she-cat mewed.
"Thank you Dazepaw," Stripeblaze meowed. As she walked past him and sat down, her soft fur brushed against him. Her crystal blue eyes locked with his for a moment, and he finally figured who she reminded him of: Rosepaw. Her personality was just like Rosepaw's, with her kindness and how she cared for everyone, but also got into trouble. Her fur, though a different colour, was similar. It had that blue tinge to it and was soft to the touch, like pure silk. Her eyes were an endless ocean of blue that could make you feel every emotion with one look, yet were as innocent as a mouse's. Though he wasn't in love with her, he felt a strange pull towards her, and cared for her like the daughter he never had.
He watched as she sat down and looked into the sunset, sighing. He padded up to her and stood beside her. "Something wrong?" he asked her.

"No, just, admiring the sunset," she replied, not taking her eyes off the beautiful sky. He stood still for a few moments more, before speaking.
"We should get back to camp," he suggested. Dazepaw nodded and stood up, picking up her herbs as she did. Stripeblaze let her walk in front of him as they made their way back to the camp and a thought crossed his mind as she happily stepped along; *Rosepaw lives on in you, you're her chance to make it right, to lead the life she always wanted. And I will care for you as if you were my own child.*

**{And that's the end! I've worked so hard on this story and honestly, I love how it turned out! This is easily one of my favourite stories that I've written and I want to thank you all for reading it! If you missed any chapters, please go back and read them as every chapter is important and has information about the story. On to 'Goldenlake's Betrayal'!
Warriorcats-mlp out for the last time time!}**